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BY

GEORGE SAINTSBURY

New York
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
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1892

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PREFACE

THE reception of two preceding volumes of essays—the one published about eighteen, the other about twelve months ago—has encouraged me to collect and issue a third. I had been somewhat doubtful what audience there might be for papers written in a perhaps unfashionable manner, and putting forward no claims except the modest ones of a good deal of reading, and an attempt to consider that reading from a uniform and definite point of view.

It would, however, have shown gross ingratitude to those readers who have been good enough to read me, if I had been encouraged by their benevolence to trouble them with what a reviewer would very properly designate "study-sweepings." The contents

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of this volume have been selected from a much larger mass of material, the composition of which covers, in point of time, the best part of twenty years ; and instead of the endeavour to secure a factitious unity by dint of some ingenious title, the contents have designedly been made as various in appearance as might be, in the hope that a sufficient real unity of critical standpoint may be found in them, whether their subjects be old or new, English or French, literary or political. For it is possible to disagree with M. Brunetière in his confession and apology, as the author of books made of articles, that "articles will never make a book." A book, as it seems to me, consists not so much in ostensibly homogeneous subject, or in the fact that the author has excogitated its plan at a single stroke, as in the unity of method, of treatment, of attitude, and of view. I hope that there is such unity here, and if there is, it may perhaps be due to the observation of three rules which I have always tried to keep before my eyes, whether in writing the history of a literature or in criticising a platform

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speech for next day's paper. These rules are: Never to like anything old merely because it is old, or anything new merely because it is new; never to judge anything in literature or politics except from the historical and comparative standpoint; and always to put the exposition of the subject before the display of personal cleverness.

The last essay here, that on "The Present State of the English Novel," will be found to be almost entirely new. A little of its substance has previously appeared in different forms, first in a Florentine periodical some seven or eight years ago, and then in the *Fortnightly Review* for February 1888. But this old matter is the smallest part of it, and I have endeavoured to adjust the whole in a different fashion from that followed in either of these papers, so as to make it less of a review of particular works and particular writers, more of a discussion and presentment of the moment in literature.

Of the other pieces, which have all undergone more or less revision, that which has been included with most misgiving is the

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third essay, that on "Modern English Prose," which was written at Mr. John Morley's request for the *Fortnightly Review* nearly seventeen years ago. I have been more often asked to reprint it than in any other case save that of the essay on Baudelaire, which also reappears. But "request of friends" is a notoriously inadequate plea, and cannot easily be allowed too little influence. I was, though not a very young man, a very young writer at the date of the appearance of the "Prose" essay, and it seems to me rather amateurish in parts, besides being subject to the drawbacks inseparable from all reviews of literature which is no longer contemporary, and has not acquired the interest of history. But its inclusion seemed desirable, because, though it is written in regard of a different side of the matter, it to a certain extent supplements and completes the more elaborate paper on much the same subject with which the book opens, and for another reason which may be thought to possess still greater force. It will strike every one who reflects for a moment

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that a great many other people, some of them *scriptores haud paullo meliores quam ego*, must have been thinking very much as I did at the time when this essay was written, and that their thought has impressed itself remarkably on later English literature. The attempts at more or less deliberate and elaborate style, which were rare before 1876, have been very numerous and very noteworthy since. And this I say, not only without the faintest intention of giving any fatuous hint of prophecy or precursorship, but also as one who does not feel unmitigated delight at the result of the efforts which at this time he desiderated.

To conclude these explanations (which may possibly annoy some readers, but which are made simply because they please me when other authors take the trouble to make them in reference to their own work), I have made the experiment of arranging together in one heading ("A Frame of Miniatures") six short articles on the lighter poets of the French eighteenth century, which originally appeared at intervals during the autumn of

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1879 in the *Saturday Review*. They were planned and written on one scale and method, and, if they have no other merit, they still, probably, give a fuller account of a curious and interesting, if not very great, set of literary personalities than is to be found together, or in anything like the same space, either in English or in French.

In the case of the first essay, which appeared originally as preface to a volume of *Specimens of English Prose Style*: London, 1885, I owe my best thanks for permission to reprint to Messrs. Kegan Paul, Trench and Co. Similar thanks are due to Messrs. Chapman and Hall, and the successive editors of the *Fortnightly Review*, in respect of the essays on "Ernest Renan" (May 1880), "Modern English Prose" (February 1876), "Saint-Evremond" (July 1879), "Charles Baudelaire" (October 1875), and a small part of "The Present State of the English Novel" (February 1888); in respect of "Thoughts on Republics," to the editor and proprietors of the *New Review* (February 1890); of "The Young England Movement,"

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to the editor and proprietors of *Merry England* (May 1883); of "A Paradox on Quinet," to the editor and proprietors of the *National Review* (June 1883); of "The Contrasts of English and French Literature," to the editor of *Macmillan's Magazine* (March 1891), and Messrs. Macmillan; and of the papers included in "A Frame of Miniatures," which appeared at various dates in the autumn and winter of 1879, to the editor and proprietors of the *Saturday Review*.

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CONTENTS

		PAGE
I.	English Prose Style	1
II.	Chamfort and Rivarol	42
III.	Modern English Prose [1876]	81
IV.	Ernest Renan	114
V.	Thoughts on Republics	161
VI.	Saint-Evremond	180
VII.	Charles Baudelaire	216
VIII.	The Young England Movement	253
IX.	A Paradox on Quinet	274
X.	The Contrasts of English and French Literature	300
XI.	A Frame of Miniatures: Parny—Dorat—Désaugiers—Vadé—Piron—Panard	336
XII.	The Present State of the English Novel, 1892	388
	INDEX	427

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I

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE

"The other harmony of prose."—*Dryden.*

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

IT was once reported that Victor Hugo, whose command of his own tongue was only equalled by his ignorance of the English language and literature, gave not long before his death his opinion of the difference between French and English prose and verse. A perfect language, he opined, should show a noteworthy difference between its style in prose and its style in verse: this difference existed in French and did not exist in English. I shall give no opinion as to the truth of this axiom in general, nor any as to its application to French. But it is not inappropriate to begin an essay on the subject of English prose style by observing that, whatever may be its merits and defects, it is entirely different—different by the extent of the whole heaven of language—from English verse style. We have had writers, including some of genius, who have striven to make

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prose like verse; and we have had other writers, including some of genius, who have striven to make verse like prose. Both in so doing have shown themselves to be radically mistaken. The actual vocabulary of the best English style of different periods is indeed almost entirely common to verse and to prose, and it is perhaps this fact which induced the distinguished person above referred to, and others not much less distinguished, to make a mistake of confusion. The times when the mere dictionary of poetic style has been distinct from the mere dictionary of prosaic style (for there have been such) have not been those in which English literature was at its highest point. But between the syntax, taking that word in its proper sense of the order of words, of prose and the syntax of verse; between the rhythm of prose and the rhythm of verse; between the sentence- and clause-architecture of prose and the sentence- and clause-architecture of verse, there has been since English literature took a durable form in the sixteenth century at least as strongly marked a difference in English as in other languages. ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

Good poets have usually been good writers of prose; but in English more than in any other tongue the prose style of these writers has differed from their verse style. The French prose and the French verse of Hugo himself are remarkably similar in all but the most arbitrary differences,

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and the same may be said, to a less extent, of the prose and the verse style of Goethe.

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

But Shelley's prose and Shelley's verse (to confine myself to examples taken from the present century) are radically different in all points of their style and verbal power; and so are Coleridge's prose and Coleridge's verse. The same is eminently true of Shakespeare, and true to a very great extent of Milton. If it is less true of Dryden and of Pope (it is often true of Dryden to a great degree), that is exactly in virtue of the somewhat un-English influence which, though it benefited English prose not a little, worked upon both. In our own days prose style has become somewhat disarranged, but in the hands of those who have any pretence to style at all, its merits and its defects are in great part clearly traceable to a keeping apart on the one hand, to a confusion on the other, of the separate and distinct aims and methods of the prose-writer and the poet.

It should scarcely be necessary to say that no attempt is made in this essay to compile a manual of English prose writing, or to lay down didactically the principles of the art. The most that can be done, or that is aimed at, is the discovery, by a running critical and historical commentary on the course of English prose generally, what have been the successive characteristics of its style, what the aims of its writers, and what the amounts of success that they have attained. There is nothing presumptuous in the attitude of the

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student, whatever there may be in the attitude of the teacher. In the year 1876, at the suggestion of Mr. John Morley, I attempted in the *Fortnightly Review* a study of the chief characteristics of contemporary prose.[1] Since then I have reviewed many hundreds of new books, and have read again, or for the first time, many hundreds of old ones. I do not know that the two processes have altered my views much: they certainly have not lessened my estimate of the difficulty of writing good prose, or of the merit of good prose when written. During these years considerable attention has undoubtedly been given by English writers to style: I wish I could think that the result has been a distinct improvement in the quality of the product. If the present object were a study of contemporary prose, much would have to be said on the growth of what I may call the Aniline style and the style of Marivaudage, the first dealing in a gorgeous and glaring vocabulary, the second in unexpected turns and twists of thought or phrase, in long-winded description of incident, and in finical analysis of motive. Unexpectedness, indeed, seems to be the chief aim of the practitioners of both, and it lays them perhaps open to the damaging question of Mr. Milestone in *Headlong Hall*. When we hear that a bar of music has "veracity," that there is a finely-executed "passage" in a marble chimney-piece, that some one is "part

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

[1] See this essay, *infra*.

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of the conscience of a nation," that the "andante" of a sonnet is specially noteworthy, the quest after the unexpected has become sufficiently evident. But these things are not directly our subject, though we shall find other things remarkably like them in the history of the past. For there is nothing new in art except its beauties, and all the faults of French naturalism and English æstheticism were doubtless perfectly well known to critics and admired by the uncritical in the days of Hilpa and Shalum.

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

Although there are delightful writers in English prose before the reign of Elizabeth, it was not till that reign[1] was some way advanced that a definite effort on the part of writers to make an English prose style can be perceived. This effort took for the most part one of two directions. The first was vernacular in the main, but very strongly tinged with a peculiar form of preciousness, the origin of which has been traced to various sources, but which appears clearly enough in the French *rhétoriqueurs* of the fifteenth century, whence it spread to Italy, Spain, and England. This style, in part almost vulgar, in part an *estilo culto* of the most quintessenced kind, was represented chiefly by Lyly. But it is in fact common to all the Elizabethan

[1] Since I wrote this it has been contended by a learned and competent authority that the golden age of English prose was the tenth century, and that we are with great difficulty recovering that Saturnian reign. It may be so: I speak but of that I do know.

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pamphleteers — Greene, Nash, Harvey, Dekker, Breton, and the rest. The vernacular in many of them descends even to vulgarity, and the cultivated in Lyly frequently ascends to the incomprehensible. Few things are more curious than this mixture of homespun and tinsel, of slang and learning, of street repartees and elaborate coterie preciousnesses. On the other hand, the more sober writers were not less classical than their forerunners, though in the endeavour to write something else than Latin sentences rendered into English, or English sentences that would translate with little alteration into Latin, they fell into new difficulties. In all the Elizabethan, Jacobean, and Caroline authors, there occur inelegancies and obscurities which may be traced directly to the attempt to imitate the forms of a language possessed of regular inflections and strict syntax in a language almost destitute of grammar. Especially fatal is the attempt to imitate the Latin relative and demonstrative pronouns, with their strict agreement of gender, number, and case, to render them in usage and meaning by the English words of all work *who*, *which*, *he*, *they*, and to copy the *oratio obliqua* in a tongue where the verbs for the most are indistinguishable whether used in *obliqua* or in *recta*. These attempts lie at the root of the faults which are found even in the succinct style of Hooker and Jonson, which turn almost to attractions in the quaint paragraph-

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

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heaps of the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, which mar many of the finest passages of Milton and Taylor, and which in Clarendon perhaps reach their climax. The abuse of conjunctions—which is also noticeable in most of the writers of this period, and which leads them, apparently out of mere wantonness, to prefer a single sentence jointed and rejointed, parenthesised and postscripted, till it does the duty of a paragraph, to a succession of orderly sentences each containing the expression of a simple or moderately complex thought—is not chargeable quite so fairly on imitation of the classics. But it has something to do with this, or rather it has much to do with the absence of any model except the classics. Most of these writers had a great deal to say, and they were as much in want of models as of deterrent examples in regard to the manner of saying it. The feeling seems still to have prevailed that if a man aimed at literary elegance and precision he should write in Latin, that English might be a convenient vehicle of matter, but was scarcely susceptible of form, that the audience was *ex hypothesi* incult, uncritical, exoteric, and neither required nor could understand refinements of phrase.

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

I have more than once seen this view of the matter treated with scorn or horror, or both, as if those who take it thought little of the beauty of seventeenth century prose before the Restoration. This treatment does not appear very intelligent.

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The business of the critic is to deal with and to explain the facts, and all the facts. It is the fact, no doubt, that detached phrases, sentences, even long passages of Milton, of Taylor, of Browne, equal if they do not excel in beauty anything that English prose has since produced. It is the fact that Clarendon is unmatched for moral portrait painting to this day; that phrase after phrase of Hobbes has the ring and the solidity and the sharp outline of a bronze coin; that Bacon is often as glorious without as within. But it is, at the same time, and not less often, the fact that Clarendon gets himself into involutions through which no breath will last, and which cannot be solved by any kind effort of repunctuation; that Milton's sentences, beginning magnificently, often end in mere tameness, sometimes in mere discord; that all the authors of the period abound in what look like wilful and gratuitous obscurities, cacophonies, breaches of sense and grammar and rhythm. To any one who considers the matter in any way critically, and not in the attitude of mind which shouts "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" by the space of as many hours as may be, it is perfectly evident that these great men, these great masters, were not thoroughly masters of their instrument; that their touch, for all its magic in its happier moments, was not certain; that they groped, and sometimes stumbled in their walk. When Browne begins the famous descant, "Now these

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

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dead bones"; when Hobbes gathers up human vice and labels it unconcernedly as "either an effect of power or a cause of pleasure"; when Milton pours forth any one of the scores of masterpieces to be found here and there in his prose work, let us hold our tongues and simply admire. But it is a merely irrational admiration which refuses to recognise that Browne's antithesis is occasionally an anti-climax and his turn of words occasionally puerile; that Milton's sentences constantly descend from the *mulier formosa* to the *piscis*; and that Hobbes, after the very phrase above quoted, spoils its effect as style by a clumsy repetition of nearly but not quite the same form of words, after a fashion which few writers possessing a tithe of Hobbes's genius would have imitated in the eighteenth century. It is still more irrational to deny that most of this great group of writers occasionally make what are neither more nor less than "faults of English," or grammatical blunders which actually vitiate their sense. Let us admire Alexander by all means, but let us not try to make out that Alexander's wry neck is worthy of an Apollo or an Antinous.

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

Among the chief reasons for this slowness on the part even of great writers in recognising the more obvious requirements of English prose style, not the least perhaps may be found in the fact that English writers had no opportunity of comparison in modern tongues. German literature

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was not, and Spanish and Italian, which had been cultivated in England with some zeal, were too alien from English in all linguistic points to be of much service. ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

The Restoration introduced the study and comparison of a language which, though still alien from English, was far less removed from it than the other Romance tongues, and which had already gone through its own reforming process with signal success. On the other hand, the period of original and copious thought ceased in England for a time, and men, having less to say, became more careful in saying it. The age of English prose which opens with Dryden and Tillotson (the former being really entitled to almost the sole credit of opening it, while Tillotson has enjoyed his reputation as a "stylist," and still more as an originator of style at a very easy rate) produced, with the exception of Swift and Dryden himself, no writer equal in genius to those of the age before it. But the talent of the writers that it did produce was infinitely better furnished with command of its weapons, and before the period had ceased English prose as an instrument may be said to have been perfected. Even in Dryden, though not very often, and in his followers Temple and Halifax occasionally, there appear examples of the old slovenlinesses; but in the writers of the Queen Anne school these entirely disappear. To the present day, though their vocabulary may have in places become slightly antiquated,

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and their phrase, especially in conversational passages, may include forms which have gone out of fashion, there is hardly anything in the structure of their clauses, their sentences, or their paragraphs, which is in any way obsolete.

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

The blemishes, indeed, which had to some extent disfigured earlier English prose, were merely of the kind that exists because no one has taken the trouble to clear it away. Given on the one side a certain conversational way of talking English, inaccurate or rather licentious as all conversational ways of speaking are, and on the other side a habit of writing exact and formal Latin, what had happened was what naturally would happen. Dryden, who during the whole of his life was a constant critical student of language and style, may be said, if not to have accomplished the change single-handed, at any rate to have given examples of it at all its stages. He in criticism chiefly, Temple in miscellaneous essay writing, and Halifax in the political pamphlet, left very little to be done, and the Queen Anne men found their tools ready for them when they began to write. It is moreover very observable that this literary change, unlike many if not most other literary changes, had hardly anything that was pedantic about it. So far was it from endeavouring to classicise English style, that most of its alterations were distinctly directed towards freeing English from

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the too great admixture of Latin grammar and style. The vernacular influence, of which, almost in its purity, the early part of the period affords such an admirable example in Bunyan, while the later part offers one not much less admirable in Defoe, is scarcely less perceptible in all the three writers just mentioned, Dryden, Temple, and Halifax, and in their three great successors, Swift, Addison, and Steele. Addison classicises the most of the six, but Addison's style cannot be called exotic. The ordinary English of the streets and the houses helped these men to reform the long sentence, with its relatives and its conjunctions, clumsily borrowed from Latin, to reject inversions and involutions of phrase that had become bewildering in the absence of the clue of inflexional sounds, to avoid attempts at *oratio obliqua* for which the syntax of the language is ill fitted, to be plain, straightforward, unadorned. It is true that in rejecting what they thought, in many instances rightly, to be barbarisms, they to a great extent lost the secret of a splendour which had been by no means exclusively or often barbaric. They were unrivalled in vigour, not easily to be beaten in sober grace, abundantly capable of wit: but as a rule they lacked magnificence, and prose was with them emphatically a *sermo pedestris*. Except in survivors of the older school, it is difficult to find in post-Restoration prose an impassioned passage. When the men of the time wished to

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

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be impassioned they thought it proper to drop into poetry. South's satire on the "fringes of the North-star" and other Taylorisms expresses their attitude very happily. It is hardly an accident that Dryden's subjects, capable though the writer was of giving literary expression to every form of thought and feeling, never in prose lead him to the inditing of anything exalted; that Temple gives a half-sarcastic turn to the brief but exquisite passage on life which closes his essay on poetry; that Addison's renowned homilies on death and tombs and a future life have rather an unrivalled decency, a propriety that is quintessential, than solemnity in the higher sense of the term. The lack of ornament in the prose of this period is perhaps nowhere more clearly shown than in the style of Locke, which, though not often absolutely incorrect, is to me, I frankly own, a disgusting style, bald, dull, plebeian, giving indeed the author's meaning, but giving it ungraced with any due apparatus or ministry. The defects, however, were for the most part negative. The writers of this time, at least the greater of them, spoilt nothing that they touched, and for the most part omitted to touch subjects for which their style was not suited. The order, lucidity, and proportion of Dryden's criticism, the ease and well-bred loquacity of Temple and the essayists, the mild or rough polemic of Halifax and Bentley, the incomparable ironic handling of Swift, the narrative

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

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and pictorial faculty, so sober and yet so vivid, of Bunyan and Defoe, are never likely to be surpassed in English literature. The generation which equals the least of them may be proud of its feat. This period, moreover, it must never be forgotten, was not merely a great period in itself as regarded production, but the schoolmaster of all periods to follow. It settled what the form, the technical form, of English prose was to be, and settled it once for all.

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

It is not usual to think or speak of the eighteenth century as reactionary, and yet, in regard to its prose style, it to some extent deserves this title. The peculiarities of this prose, the most famous names among whose practitioners are Johnson and Gibbon, exhibit a decided reaction against the plainness and vernacular energy which, as has been said, characterised writers from Dryden to Swift. Lord Chesterfield's well-known denunciation of proverbial phrases in speaking and writing, and the Latinisms of the extreme Johnsonian style, may seem to have but little to do with each other, but they express in different ways the revolt of the fine gentleman and the revolt of the scholar against the simplicity and homeliness of the style which had gone before. The men of 1660-1720 had not been afraid of Latinisms, but they had not sought them: the *ampullae et sesquipedalia verba* of Johnson at his worst were

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by no means peculiar to himself, but may be found alike in the prose and the verse of writers over whom he exercised little or no influence. The altered style, however, in the hands of capable men became somewhat more suitable for the dignified branches of sustained prose-writing. We shall never have a greater historian in style as well as in matter than Gibbon; in style at least we have not beaten Hume, though there has been more than a century to do it in. Berkeley belongs mainly to the latest school of seventeenth century writers, to the Queen Anne men, but partly also to the eighteenth century proper; and he, again with Hume as a second, is as unlikely to be surpassed in mastery of philosophical style as Gibbon and Hume are unlikely to be surpassed in the style of history. Nor were there wanting tendencies and influences which counteracted to a great extent the striving for elaboration and dignity. The chief of these was the growth of the novel. This is not only in itself a kind unfriendly to a pompous style, but happened to attract to its practice the great genius of Fielding, which was from nothing so averse as from everything that had the semblance or the reality of pretension, pedantry, or conceit. Among the noteworthy writers of the time, not a few stand apart from its general tendencies, and others exhibit only part of those tendencies. The homely and yet graceful narrative of the author of *Peter Wilkins* derives evidently from

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

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Defoe; the gossiping of the letters of Walpole, Gray, and others, is an attempt partly to imitate French models, partly to reproduce the actual talk of society; Sterne's deliberate eccentricity is an adaptation, as genius of course adapts, of Rabelais and Burton, while the curious and inimitable badness of the great Bishop Butler's form is evidently due, not like Locke's to carelessness and contempt of good literary manners, but to some strange idiosyncrasy of defect. On the whole, however, the century not merely added immortal examples to English prose, but contributed not a little to the further perfecting of the general instrument. A novelist like Fielding, a historian like Gibbon, a philosopher like Hume, an orator and publicist like Burke, could not write without adding to the capacities of prose in the hands of others as well as to its performances in their own. They gave a further extension to the system of modulating sentences and clauses with a definite regard to harmony. Although there may be too much monotony in his method, it seems unlikely that Gibbon will ever be surpassed in the art of arranging the rhythm of a sentence of not inconsiderable length without ever neglecting co-ordination, and at the same time, without ever committing the mistake of exchanging the rhythm proper to prose for the metre which is proper to poetry. Much the same may be said of Burke when he is at

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

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his best, while two earlier ornaments of the period, Bolingbroke and Conyers Middleton, though their prose is less rhythmical, are scarcely less remarkable for a deliberate and systematic arrangement of the sentence within itself and of the sentences in the paragraph. To enumerate separate particulars in which the eighteenth and late seventeenth centuries subjected English prose to laws would be appropriate rather to a manual of composition than to an essay like the present. For instance, such details as the reform of punctuation, and especially the more frequent use of the full stop, as the avoidance of the homoeoteleuton, and if possible of the same word, unless used emphatically, in the same sentence, can be only very summarily referred to. But undoubtedly the matter of principal importance was the practice, which as a regular practice began with Dryden and was perfected in Gibbon, of balancing and proportioning the sentence. Of course there are numerous or innumerable examples of exquisitely proportioned sentences in Milton and his contemporaries, but that is not to the point. What is to the point is such a sentence as the following from the *Areopagitica*: "But if his rear and flanks be not impaled, if his back-door be not secured by the rigid licenser but that a bold book may now and then issue forth and give the assault to some of his old collections in their trenches, it will concern him then to keep waking, to stand in watch, to set good

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guards and sentinels about his received opinions, to walk the round and counter-round with his fellow-inspectors, fearing lest any of his flock be seduced, *who then also would be better instructed, better exercised and disciplined.*" Here the sentence begins excellently, winds up the height to "trenches," and descends again in an orderly and regular fashion to "seduced." There in sense, in sound, by all the laws of verbal architecture, it should stop: but the author has an afterthought, and he tacks on the words italicised, thereby ruining the balance of his phrase, and adding an unnecessary and disturbing epexegesis to his thought. Had Milton lived a hundred years later he would no more have committed this merely careless and inerudite fault than Gibbon would.

Like all rules of general character, the balancing of the sentence has of course its difficulties and its dangers. Carried out on principles too uniform, or by means too obvious, it becomes monotonous and disgusting. It is a considerable encouragement to sonorous platitude, and (as satirists have sometimes amused themselves by showing) it can sometimes be used to disguise and carry off the simply unmeaning. When Mrs. St. Clair in *The Inheritance* uttered that famous sentence, "Happy the country whose nobles are thus gifted with the power of reflecting kindred excellence, and of perpetuating national virtue on the broad basis of private friendship,"

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she owed everything to the fact that she was born after Dr. Johnson. Very large numbers of public speakers in and out of pulpits were, during the time when prose rhythm by means of balance was enforced or expected, in a similar case of indebtedness. But the amount of foolish speech and writing in the world has not appreciably lessened since every man became a law unto himself in the matter of composition. And for my part I own, though it may be immoral, that I prefer a platitude which seems as if it might have some meaning, and at any rate sounds well as sound, to a platitude which is nakedly and cacophonously platitudinous or senseless,—still more to one which bedizens itself with adjectives and crepitates, as Dr. Johnson might have said, with attempts at epigram. The Latinising of the language was a greater evil by far, but one of no lasting continuance. No permanent harm came to English literature from Johnson's noted second thought about vitality and putrefaction, or from Armstrong's singular fancy (it is true this was in verse) for calling a cold bath a gelid cistern. The fashion rose, lived, died, as fashions do. But beauty looks only a little less beautiful in the ugliest fashion, and so the genius and talent of the eighteenth century showed themselves only to a little less advantage because of their predilection for an exotic vocabulary. No harm was done, but much good, to the theory and practice of verbal

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

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architecture, and if inferior material was sometimes used, Time has long since dealt with each builder's work in his usual just and equal fashion.

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

With the eighteenth century, speaking generally,—with Burke and Gibbon, speaking particularly,—what may be called the consciously or unconsciously formative period of English prose came to an end. In the hundred years that have since passed we have had not a few prose writers of great genius, many of extreme talent. But they have all either deliberately innovated upon, or obediently followed, or carefully neglected, the two great principles which were established between 1660 and 1760, the principle, that is to say, which limited the meaning of a sentence to a moderately complex thought in point of matter, and that which admitted the necessity of balance and coherent structure in point of form. One attempt at the addition of a special kind of prose, an attempt frequently made but foredoomed to failure, I shall have to notice, but only one.

The great period of poetical production which began with the French Revolution and lasted till about 1830, saw also much prose of merit. Coleridge, Southey, Shelley, are eminent examples in both prose and verse, while Wordsworth, Byron, Moore, and others, come but little behind. Scott, the most voluminous of all except perhaps Southey in prose composition, occupies a rather

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ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

peculiar position. The astonishing rapidity of his production, and his defective education (for good prose-writing is far more a matter of scholarship than good verse-writing), may have had a somewhat injurious influence on his style; but this style has on the whole been rated much too low, and at its best is admirable English. The splendour, however, of the poetical production of the later Georgian period in poetry no doubt eclipsed its production in prose, and as a general rule that prose was rather even and excellent in general characteristics than eminent or peculiar in special quality. The same good sense which banished the artificial vocabulary of poetry achieved the banishing of it from prose. But except that it is always a little less stiff, and sometimes a little more negligent, the best prose written by men of middle or advanced age when George the Third was dying does not differ very greatly from the best prose written by men of middle or advanced age when he came to the throne. The range of subjects, the tone of thought, might be altered, the style was very much the same; in fact, there can be very little doubt that while the poets deliberately rebelled against their predecessors, the prose writers, who were often the same persons in another function, deliberately followed, if they did not exactly imitate them.

It was not until the end of this period of brilliant poetry that certain persons more or less deliberately set themselves to revolutionise English

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prose, as the poets for a full generation had been revolutionising English verse. I say more or less deliberately, for the revived fashion of "numerous" prose which one man of genius and one man of the greatest talent, Thomas de Quincey and John Wilson, proclaimed, which others seem to have adopted without much of set purpose, and which, owing especially to the great example of Mr. Ruskin, has enlisted so large a following, was in its origin partial and casual. The introducers of this style have hardly had due honour or due dishonour, for what they have done is not small, whatever may be thought of its character. Indeed, at the present day, among a very large proportion of general readers, and among a certain number of critics, "style" appears to be understood in the sense of ornate and semi-metrical style. A work which is "not remarkable for style" is a work which does not pile on the adjectives, which abstains from rhythm so pronounced and regular that it ceases to be rhythm merely and becomes metre, which avoids rather than seeks the drawing of attention to originality of thought by singularity of expression, and which worships no gods but proportion, clearness, closeness of expression to idea, and (within the limits incident to prose) rhythmical arrangement. To confess the truth, the public has so little prose of this latter quality put before it, and is so much accustomed to find that every writer whose style

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

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ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

is a little above the school exercise, and his thought a little above platitude, aims at the distinction of prose-poet, that it has some excuse for its blunder. That it is a blunder I shall endeavour to show a little later. For the present, it is sufficient to indicate the period of George the Fourth's reign as the beginning of the flamboyant style in modern English prose. Besides the two persons just mentioned, whose writings were widely distributed in periodicals, three other great masters of prose, though not inclined to the same form of prose-poetry, did not a little to break down the tradition of English prose in which sobriety was the chief thing aimed at. These were Carlyle, with his Germanisms of phrase and his sacrifice (not at all German) of order to emphasis in arrangement; Macaulay, with his sententious clause and his endless fire of snapping antitheses; and lastly, with not much influence on the general reader, but with much on the special writer, Landor, who, together with much prose that is nearly perfect, gave the innovators the countenance of an occasional leaning to the florid, and of a neo-classicism which was sometimes un-English.

Side by side with these great innovators there were no doubt many and very excellent practitioners of the older and simpler style. Southey survived and Lockhart flourished as accomplished examples of it in one great literary organ; the influence of Jeffrey was exerted vigorously, if

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not always wisely, to maintain it in another. Generally speaking, it was not admitted before 1850 that the best models for a young man in prose could be any other than the chief ornaments of English literature from Swift and Addison to Gibbon and Burke. The examples of the great writers above mentioned, however, could not fail to have a gradual effect; and, as time passed, more and more books came to be written in which one of two things was evident. The one was that the author had tried to write a prose-poem as far as style was concerned, the other that he was absolutely without principles of style. I can still find no better instance of this literary antinomianism than I found of old[1] in Grote's history, where there is simply no style at all. The chief political speeches and the most popular philosophical works of the day supply examples of this antinomian eminence in other departments. Take almost any chief speaker of either House and compare him with Burke or Canning or Lord Lyndhurst; take almost any living philosopher and compare him with Berkeley, with Hume, or even with Mill, and the difference is obvious at once. As history, as politics, as philosophy, the later examples may be excellent. But as literature they are not comparable with the earlier.

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

In the department of luxuriant ornament, the example of Mr. Ruskin may be said to have

[1] See the essay before referred to.

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rendered all other examples comparatively superfluous, though many of our later practitioners, as usual, scorn their model. From the date of the first appearance of *Modern Painters*, the prose-poetry style has more and more engrossed attention and imitation. It has eaten up history, permeated novel-writing, affected criticism so largely that those who resist it in that department are but a scattered remnant. It is unnecessary to quote instances, for the fact is very little likely to be gainsaid, and if it is gainsaid at all, will certainly not be gainsaid by any person who has frequent and copious examples of English style coming before him for criticism.[1]

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

At the same time the period of individualism has given rise, as a former period of something like individualism did in the seventeenth century, to some great and to many remarkable writers. Of these, so far as they have not been distinguished by an adherence to the ornate style, and so far as they have not, with the disciples of literary incuria, let style go to the winds altogether, Mr. Carlyle was during all his later days the chief, and in not a few cases the model. But he had seconds in the work, in many of whom literary genius to a great extent supplied the want of academic correctness.

[1] It should perhaps be added that in the seven years since the text was first written the popularity—in each case late, in each well deserved, but in each also too often a matter of mere fashion, as was the previous neglect of them—of Mr. Browning in verse and of Mr. Meredith in prose has set fresh models before those whose one idea is to escape, at any cost, the appearance of commonplace. [1892.]

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Thackeray, with some remarkable slovenlinesses (he is probably the last writer of the first eminence of whom the enemy "and which" has made a conquest), elaborated, rather it would seem by practice and natural genius, than in the carrying out of any theory, a style which for the lighter purposes of literature has no rival in urbanity, flexibility, and width of range since Addison, and which has found the widest acceptance among men of letters. Dickens again, despite very great faults of bad taste and mannerism, did not lack the qualities of a great writer. He seldom had occasion for a sustained effort in prose writing, and the "tricks and manners" to which he was so unfortunately given lent themselves but too easily to imitation. Of the many writers of merit who stand beside and below these two space here forbids detailed mention. There are also many earlier authors who, either because they have been merely exceptional, or because they have been examples of tendencies which others have exhibited in a more characteristic manner, have not been noticed specially in the foregoing sketch. To take the last century only, Cobbett ranks with Bunyan and Defoe as the third of a trio of deliberately vernacular writers. The exquisite grace and charm of Lamb, springing in part no doubt from an imitation of the "giant race before the flood," especially Fuller, Browne, and Burton, had yet in it so much of idiosyncrasy that it has never been and is never

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

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likely to be successfully imitated. Peacock, an accomplished scholar and a master of irony, has a peculiarity which is rather one of thought than of style, of viewpoint towards the world at large than of expression of the views taken. The late Lord Beaconsfield, unrivalled at epigram and detached phrase, very frequently wrote and sometimes spoke below himself, and in particular committed the fault of substituting for a kind of English Voltairian style, which no one could have brought to greater perfection if he had given his mind to it, corrupt followings of the sensibility and philosophism of Diderot and the mere grandiloquence of Buffon.

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

Thus then the course of English prose style presents, in little, the following picture. Beginning for the most part with translations from Latin or French, with prose versions of verse writings, and with theological treatises aiming more at edification, and at the edification of the vulgar, than at style, it was not till after the invention of printing that it attempted perfection of form. But in its early strivings it was much hindered, first by the persistent attempt to make an uninflected do the duty of an inflected language, and secondly, by the curious flood of conceits which accompanied, or helped, or were caused by the Spanish and Italian influences of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In the latter period we find men of the greatest genius

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producing singularly uneven and blemished work, owing to the want of an accepted theory and practice of style; each man writing as seemed good in his own eyes, and selecting not merely his vocabulary (as to that a great freedom has always, and rightly, prevailed in England), but his arrangement of clauses and sentences, and even to some extent his syntax. To this period of individualism an end was put by Dryden, whose example in codifying and reforming was followed for nearly a century. During this period the syntactical part of English grammar was settled very nearly as it has hitherto remained; the limitation of the sentence to a single moderately simple proposition, or at most to two or three propositions closely connected in thought, was effected; the arrangement of the single clause was prescribed as nearly as possible in the natural order of vocal speech, inversions being reserved as an exception and a license for the production of some special effect; the use of the parenthesis was (perhaps unduly) discouraged; and a general principle was established that the cadence as well as the sense of a sentence should rise gradually toward the middle, should if necessary continue there on a level for a brief period, and should then descend in a gradation corresponding to its ascent. These principles were observed during the whole of the eighteenth century, and with little variation during the first quarter of the nineteenth, a certain range of liberty being given by

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

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ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

the increasing subdivision of the subjects of literature, and especially by the growth of fiction and of periodical writing on more or less ephemeral matters. The continuance of this latter process, the increased study of foreign (especially German) literature, the disuse of Greek and Latin as the main instruments of education, and the example of eminent or popular writers, first in small and then in great numbers, have during the last fifty years induced a return of individualism. This has in most cases taken the form either of a neglect of regular and orderly style altogether, or of the preference of a highly ornamented diction, and a poetical rather than prosaic rhythm. The great mass of writers belong to the first division, the smaller number who take some pains about the ordering of their sentences almost entirely to the second. That this laboured and ornate manner will not last very long is highly probable, that it should last long would be out of keeping with experience. But it is not so certain that its disappearance will be followed by anything like a return to the simplicity of theory and practice in style which, while it left eighteenth century and late seventeenth century authors full room to display individual talents and peculiarities, still caused between them the same resemblance which exists in examples of an order of architecture or of a natural species.

So much has been said about the balancing

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of the sentence, and the rhythm appropriate to prose and distinct from metre, that the reader may fairly claim to be informed somewhat more minutely of the writer's views on the subject. They will have to be put to a certain extent scholastically, but the thing is really a scholastic question, and the impatience with "iambs and pentameters," which Mr. Lowell (a spokesman far too good for such a breed) condescended to express some forty years ago on behalf of the vulgar, is in reality the secret of much of the degradation of recent prose. In dealing with this subject I shall have to affront an old prejudice which has apparently become young again —the prejudice which deems terms of quantity inapplicable to the English and other modern languages. The truth is, that the metrical symbols and system of scansion which the genius of the Greeks invented, are applicable to all European languages, though (and this is where the thoroughgoing defenders of accent against quantity make their blunder) the quantity of particular syllables is much more variable. In other words, there are far more common syllables in English and other modern languages than in Latin, or even in the language of those

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

> Quibus est nihil negatum
> Et queis "ārĕs ărēs" licet sonare.

A Greek would have laughed heartily enough at the notion that the alternative quantity of

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ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

Ares made it impossible to scan Homer regularly. And an Englishman may borrow the laugh: despite the large number of syllables (not by any means all) in his language which are capable of being made long or short according to the pleasure of the writer and the exigencies of the verse. All good English verse, from the rudest ballad of past centuries to the most elaborate harmonies of Mr. Swinburne and Lord Tennyson, is capable of being exhibited in metrical form as strict in its final, if not in its initial laws, as that which governs the prosody of Horace or of Euripides. Most bad English verse is capable of having its badness shown by the application of the same tests. In using therefore longs and shorts, and the divisions of classical metre from Pyrrhic to dochmiac, in order to exhibit the characteristics of English prose rhythm and the differences which it exhibits from the metre which is verse rhythm, I am using disputed means deliberately and with the fullest intention and readiness to defend them if required.[1]

I take it that the characteristic of metre—that is to say, poetic rhythm—is not only the recurrence of the same feet in the same line, but also the recurrence of corresponding and similar arrangements of feet in different lines.

[1] It has been pointed out to me, since the following remarks were written, that I might have sheltered myself under a right reverend precedent in the shape of some criticism of Hurd's on the rhythmical peculiarities of Addison. I do so now all the more willingly, that no one who compares the two passages will suspect me of merely following the bishop.

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The Greek chorus, and in a less degree the English pindaric, exhibit the first characteristic scantly, but they make up, in the first case by a rigid, and in the second by what ought to be a rigid, adherence to the second. In all other known forms of literary European verse —Greek, Latin, English, French, Italian, Spanish, German—both requirements are complied with in different measure or degree, from the cast-iron regularity of the Latin alcaic to the wide license of a Greek comic senarius or an English anapæstic tetrameter. In blank verse or in couplets every verse is (certain equivalent values being once recognised) exactly equal to every other verse. In stanzas from the quatrain to the Spenserian the parallelism, if more intricate, is equally exact.

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

Now the requirement of a perfect prose rhythm is that, while it admits of indication by quantity-marks, and even by divisions into feet, the simplicity and equivalence of feet within the clause answering to the line are absent, and the exact correspondence of clause for clause, that is to say, of line for line, are absent also, and still more necessarily absent. Let us take an example. I know no more perfect example of English prose rhythm than the famous verses of the last chapter of the Canticles in the Authorised Version; I am not certain that I know any so perfect. Here they are, arranged for the purpose of exhibition in clause-lines, quantified and divided into feet.

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Sĕt mĕ | ăs ă seăl | ŭpŏn thĭne heărt | ăs ă seăl | ŭpŏn thĭne ārm |
ENGLISH PROSE STYLE. Fŏr lōve | ĭs strōng | ăs deăth | jeălŏusў | ĭs crūĕl | ăs thĕ grāve |
Thĕ coăls thĕreŏf | āre coăls | ŏf fīrĕ | whĭch hāth | ă mŏst vē | hĕmĕnt flāme |
Mănў wătĕrs | cănnŏt quēnch lōve | neĭthĕr | căn thĕ floōds | drōwn ĭt |
Ĭf ă mān | shoŭld gīve | ăll thĕ sūb | stānce | ŏf hĭs hoūse | fŏr lōve | ĭt shŏuld ūt | tĕrlў bĕ cŏntēmned. |

I by no means give the quantification of this, or the distribution into lines and feet as final or impeccable, though I think it is, on the whole—as a good elocutionist would read the passage—accurate enough. But the disposition will, I think, be sufficient to convince any one who has an ear and a slight acquaintance with *res metrica*, that here is a system of rhythm irreducible to poetic form. The movement of the whole is perfectly harmonious, exquisitely modulated, finally complete. But it is the harmony of finely modulated speech, not of song; harmony, in short, but not melody, divisible into clauses, but not into bars or staves, having parts which continue each other, but do not correspond to each other. A similar example may be found in the almost equally beautiful Charity passage of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, and if the reader likes to see how the sense of rhythm flourishes in these days, he may compare that with the version which has been substituted for it by the persons called Revisers. But let us

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take an example of different kind and of less elaborate but still beautiful form, the already cited close of Sir William Temple's Essay on Poetry :— ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

"When all is done, human life is at the greatest and the best but like a froward child, that must be played with and humoured a little to keep it quiet till it falls asleep, and then the care is over."

Here the division is that which has been noted as the usual one in eighteenth century prose, an arsis (to alter the use of the word a little) as far as "child," a level space of progress till "asleep," and then a thesis, here unusually brief, but quite sufficient for the purpose. But here also the movement is quite different from that of poetry. Part of the centre clause, "but like a froward child that must be played with," may indeed be twisted into something like a heroic, but there is nothing corresponding to it earlier or later, and the twisting itself is violent and unnatural. For the clause or prose line does not begin at "but" and does not end at "with."

Here is yet another and longer passage, this time from Mr. Ruskin, who, though he has by no means always observed the distinction we are discussing, and has taught many maladroit imitators to neglect it, is, when he is at his best, thoroughly sound. The sentence chosen shall be a long one, such as the writer loves :—

"He did not teach them how to build for

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glory and for beauty, He did not give them the fearless, faithful, inherited energies that worked on and down from death to death, generation after generation, that we might give the work of their poured-out spirit to the axe and to the hammer: He has not cloven the earth with rivers that their wild white waves might turn wheels and push paddles, nor turned it up under, as it were fire, that it might heat wells and cure diseases: He brings not up His quails by the east wind only to let them fall in flesh about the camp of men: He has not heaped the rocks of the mountain only for the quarry, nor clothed the grass of the field only for the oven."

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

At first sight it may seem as if this admirable passage (the brilliant effect of which is not in the least due to spilth of adjectives, or to selection of exotic words, or to eccentricity of word-order, for the vocabulary is very simple and plain, and the order is quite natural) incurs some of the blame due to the merely conglomerate sentence, in which the substitution of full stops for colons or commas is sufficient to break up the whole into independent wholes. But it does not, and it is saved from this condemnation not merely by the close connection of its matter, but by the arrangement of its form. The separate members have a varying but compensating harmony, and the ascent and descent of the sentence never finally ends till the last word, which has been led up to by a most cunning and in no

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invidious sense prosaic concatenation of rhythm. Mr. Ruskin, it is true, is not always impeccable. In a fine passage of *The Harbours of England* (too long for quotation, but which may be conveniently found at p. 378 of the *Selections* from his works) I find the following complete heroics imbedded in the prose :— ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

"Hot in the morning sun, rusty and seamed."
"The grass of spring, the soft white cloud of foam."
"Fading or flying high into the breeze."
"Brave lives dashed
Away about the rattling beach like weeds."
"Still at the helm of every lonely boat,
Through starless night and hopeless dawn, His hand."

Now this is wrong, though of course it is impossible always to avoid a complete heroic cadence. So is it, also, with a very elaborate, and in its somewhat illegitimate way, very beautiful passage of Charles Kingsley — the dream of Amyas at the Devil's Limekiln, in *Westward Ho!* This sins not by conscious or unconscious insertions of blank verse, but by the too definitely regular and lyrical sweep of the rhythm in the words, "I saw the grand old galleon," etc. This is the great difficulty of very ornate prose, that it is constantly tending to overstep the line between the two rhythms. When this fault is avoided, and the prose abides strictly by its own laws, and draws its ornament, not from aniline dyes of vocabulary, but from

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harmony of arrangement, nothing can be more beautiful and more satisfactory. But in fact such prose does not differ at all in kind from satisfactory specimens of the simpler style, and it was De Quincey's great critical fault that he not only overlooked but denied this identity in his scornful criticisms of the style of Swift and other severe writers. The same principles are applied with more or less elaboration as the case may be, the criterion of appropriateness in each case being the nature of the subject and the circumstances of the utterance.

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

It is because the rule of prose writing is in this way so entirely a *μολύβδινος κανὼν*, because between the limits of cacophony on the one hand and definitely metrical effect on the other, the practitioner must always choose and can never merely follow, that prose writing is so difficult, that the examples of great eminence in it are so rare, and that even these examples are for the most part so unequal. It is easy to produce long passages of English poetry which are absolutely flawless, which, each according to its own plan and requirements, could not be better. It is by no means easy to produce long passages of English prose, or of any prose, of which as much can be said. The artist lacks the help of obvious and striking error which he possesses in poetry. In poetry, as in the typewriter on which I write these words, a bell rings loudly to warn of certain simple dangers. The muse of prose is silent,

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however awkwardly her suitors make love to her. In the simpler style there is of course less danger of flaws—Swift is often quite impeccable—but as the style rises the danger increases. I do not think that even in Landor or in Mr. Ruskin, the most accomplished, as the most opposed, English writers of the elaborate style during this century, it is possible to find an unbroken passage of very considerable length which is absolutely faultless.

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

This art of rhythmical arrangement, applicable in sentences so simple as that quoted from Temple, as much as in sentences so complex as that quoted from Mr. Ruskin, applicable indeed in sentences much simpler than the one and even more complicated than the other, is undoubtedly the principal thing in prose. Applied in its simplest forms, it is constantly missed by the vulgar, but is perhaps productive of not least pleasure to the critic. Of its subsidiary arts and arrangements of art, space would fail me to speak at length, but the two most important articles, so important, indeed, that with the architectural process they may be said to form the three great secrets of prose success, are simplicity of language, and directness of expression in the shorter clause and phrase. It is against these two that the pseudo-stylists of our day sin most constantly. A gaudy vocabulary is thought a mark of style: a non-natural, twisted, allusive phrase is thought a mark of it. Now no reasonable person, certainly

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no competent critic, will advocate a *grisâtre* style; all that such a critic will contend for is a remembrance of the rule of the Good Clerk,—

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

Red ink for ornament and black for use.

There are occasions for red ink in prose writing, no doubt; but they are not every man's occasions, nor are they, for the men whose occasions they are, on every day or on every subject. Not only the test passages taken above, but almost any well-selected Prose Anthology will show what extreme error, what bad art, what blind lack of observation, is implied in the peppering and salting of sentence after sentence with strange words or with familiar words used strangely. It is not wanted to produce the effect aimed at; it may safely be added that it produces the effect aimed at only in the case of persons who are not competent to judge whether the mark has been hit. Obscurity of phrase, on the other hand, is only a more venial crime than gaudiness of language because it takes a little more trouble on the part of the sinner. It is at least as bad in itself. It may safely be laid down that in almost any case where the phrase is not comprehended as soon as read by a person of decent intelligence and education—in almost any case where, without quite exceptional need for emphasis or for attracting his attention, a non-natural, involved, laboured diction is used—in almost any case

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where, as Addison has it of Durfey, "words are brought together that, without his good offices, would never have been acquainted with one another, so long as it had been a tongue"—there is bad style. Exceptions there are, no doubt, as in the other case; the fault, as always, is in making the exception the rule. ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

To conclude, the remarks which have been made in this essay are no doubt in many cases disputable, probably in some cases mistaken. They are given not as *dogma*, but as *doxa*; not as laws to guide practitioners whose practice is very likely better than the lawgiver's, but as the result of a good many years' reading of the English literature of all ages with a constantly critical intent. And of that critical intent one thing can be said with confidence, that the presence and the observation of it, so far from injuring the delight of reading, add to that delight in an extraordinary degree. It infuses toleration in the study of the worst writers—for there is at any rate the result of a discovery or an illustration of some secret of badness; it heightens the pleasure in the perusal of the best by transforming a confused into a rational appreciation. I do not think that keeping an eye on style ever interfered with attention to matter in any competent writer; I am quite sure that it never interfered with that attention in any competent reader. Less obvious, more contestable in detail, far more difficult of continuous

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observance than the technical excellences of verse, the technical excellences of prose demand, if a less rare, a not less alert and vigorous exercise of mental power to produce or to appreciate them. Nor will any time spent in acquiring pleasant and profitable learning be spent to much better advantage than the time necessary to master the principles and taste the expression of what has been called, by a master of both, "the *other* harmony of prose."

ENGLISH PROSE STYLE.

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II

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL[1]

AMONG the many classes into which literature and literary men may be divided, there is one, the contents and members of which are only half literary. Whenever a certain stage of society is reached, the art of managing words becomes fashionable, like any other art, and practitioners of it arise whose main object is to recommend themselves to society by their dexterity. Not only is this process a certain one in point of time, but it also has certain constant and unvarying peculiarities. The persons who thus distinguish themselves as "wits" (for that, though not an altogether satisfactory term, is the only

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

[1] Since this essay was written fresh selections from both Chamfort and Rivarol have been made by M. de Lescure, who has also added much to our biographical knowledge, of the latter especially. As, however, I deal here with the work rather than with the lives, it does not seem necessary to do more than refer the studious reader to this authority, and to observe that in Rivarol's case, as in De Quincey's, scepticism as to his own accounts of himself seems to have rather overshot the mark. [1892.]

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one that occurs to me), are usually born members of their society at first. By degrees they become members in virtue of their qualifications for the practice. The catalogue begins with Chesterfields and Saint-Evremonds, but it is pretty sure to end with Chamforts and Sydney Smiths. It is also noticeable that the men of this class rarely succeed in the highest degree when they endeavour to produce serious literary work. Their reputation lives, but the inquirer into that reputation very often fails to discern much ground for it in the definite work which they leave behind them. Chesterfield's *Letters* is, indeed, a performance of great merit, and extraordinarily undervalued nowadays. Saint-Evremond's *Historiette* of the Père Canaye is a triumph of quiet irony. But posterity has altogether declined to acknowledge *La Jeune Indienne* as possessing the least claim to be read; and pleasant as is *Peter Plymley*, the political interest, that is to say, the least lasting of all interests for all but a few students in all but a few cases, is the best of it. The fame of the brotherhood rests mainly on the memory of their talk—sometimes preserved more or less faithfully in recorded witticisms, sometimes demanding to be taken altogether on trust. In the latter case the reputation of such men is apt to die away almost as soon as the society which knew them is gone. In the former they are saved by the fact of

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

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their being, in Fuseli's blunt language, "D—d good to steal from."

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

There are many reasons why this class should be better represented in French than in any other language. The joint revolution which passed nearly three hundred years ago over French society and French literature, helped the natural tendency of the race to produce them. The peculiar saline quality, which owes its name to Latin, but in which Latin writers are so singularly deficient, manifested itself as soon as Frenchmen began to write at all, probably as soon as they began to speak. But, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Malherbe and Balzac and the Academy conspired to make the language more suitable for polished and yet pregnant witticism than it had ever been before; while Richelieu and Madame de Rambouillet conspired, quite innocently, to provide a public greedy of such utterances, and quick to reward in various ways those who could make them. Among the earliest, and certainly among the most distinguished of the class, was, as I have said, Saint-Evremond, a man of a curious idiosyncrasy, half French and half English, possessing, among other un-French gifts, the gift of sustained irony, without the least snigger of countenance or quaver of voice. For a century and a half emulous followers endeavoured to supply Saint-Evremond's place, and in the five-and-twenty or thirty years before the Revolution the crop of wits was at its thickest.

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CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

The *Philosophe* movement had had the effect of opening society to almost any one who had brains and a decent exterior, and the memorable disgust with which M. de Castries talked of a certain famous quarrel was not shared by many of his contemporaries. Envious rivals might assert with perfect truth that M. de Chamfort had made himself a present both of the Chamfort and of the De. The same persons might remark, truly or not, that M. le Comte de Rivarol, or M. le Chevalier de Parcieux (for Rivarol oscillated between these two pleasing titles), was, in plain French, an innkeeper's son, of the name of Riverot. But the great folks whom they amused cared very little for this even before the Revolution broke out, and when it had once broken out there was no longer any question about names or fathers. The wit of the salons promptly became a pamphleteer on one side or the other, and helped to point and wing the darts which both sides so freely flung. This group—Rulhière, Chamfort, Rivarol, Champcenetz, Laclos, Garat, and the rest—not merely figure as links between the chamber-wits of the eighteenth century and the journalists of the nineteenth, but in their persons, for the most part, served first in one class and then in the other. Indeed, in the condition to which they had brought the business of wit, it was only a variety of journalism, save that the sharp things said on current events were said to

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a smaller public, and were reproduced by a less trustworthy medium than the press.

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

Of this group the most remarkable beyond doubt were the two men whose names stand at the head of this essay. They were both (to use a cant phrase which has been invented since their day) self-made men, they both illustrated in ways slightly different some of the most remarkable aspects of the French literary genius, and they have both left on record some of the sharpest and strongest-winged sayings that human ingenuity has ever framed. Neither—Chamfort even less than Rivarol—has left any single or definite literary work of great or decided value. One, from the accidents of his history as well as from his temperament and disposition, took the popular side in the great schism of the last decade of the eighteenth century, and had occasion amply to repent it. The other, less impulsive and more clear-sighted, took the side of precedent and authority, supported it with all his might, and derived profit from it, though he died long before its temporary triumph. Since their death the so-called works of both have been collected into what Mr. Carlyle has called formless agglomerations, a careless study of which might lead men to wonder how two such men should possibly have set their names to work so frequently spiritless and jejune. The standard edition of Chamfort published some fifty years ago in five volumes is reasonably complete,

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but cumbrous and unattractive in form. The author's writings—tales more indecent than those of La Fontaine or even the Fabliau writers, but curiously lacking in pungency, academic discourses, reviews, dramas, and last, but of almost sole importance, maxims and anecdotes—are all to be found there. Rivarol has been less fortunate. The so-called *Œuvres Complètes* published at the beginning of the century by Fayolle and Chênedollé are anything but complete. They have to be supplemented by a volume of *Pensées Inédites* which appeared in 1836, and by a collection published in 1877 by M. Poulet-Malassis. In this latter, the editor has rescued from the *Journal Politique National* a *Lettre sur la Capture de l'Abbé Maury à Peronne*, which he not unjustly compares to Saint-Evremond's already mentioned masterpiece, and which will also remind some readers of Gérard de Nerval's adventure with the gendarmes at Crespy. Both Chamfort and Rivarol have been more than once subjected to the process of selection, for which they are peculiarly adapted, but which is in their case no easy task. M. Poulet-Malassis alludes to a satisfactory selection of Rivarol as at last about to appear; but I have never heard of its appearance, and it is much to be feared that it must have been one of the projects which his own death cut short.[1] At present many of Rivarol's best things have to

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

[1] See note above.

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be sought for in his most dreary and unequal treatise *De l'Homme Intellectuel et Moral*, or else taken on trust through the medium of not too judicious selectors. Even as it is, however, the brighter and sometimes traditional sayings of both have served thousands of duller labourers with the pen as seasonings to render palatable their own savourless compositions. These sayings and a few of their longer works are naturally the most interesting points about them; but their personal history is not unimportant towards a due apprehension of them, and to this I may give a few lines in the first place.

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

Chamfort, who was born in 1741, was of illegitimate birth. All that we hear of his mother is that she was somebody's companion, and the only name to which the future wit seems to have had any right was the simple baptismal name of Nicolas. M. Nicolas, however, was not so well contented with that title as his remarkable contemporary Restif de la Bretonne, and he had not, like the latter, a genealogy dating from the Emperor Pertinax to fall back upon. Somehow or other he obtained a good scholarship at an endowed school, and there received a thorough education according to the ideas of the time, an education, the test and mark of which were successful prize poems and essays. The French world of those days, if not of these, offered considerable opportunities to any one who was

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fort en thème. The frequent prize competitions of the Academy supplied an easy introduction, not merely to a literary career, but also to a warm reception in salons and supper parties. It is true that these competitions, as Mademoiselle de Lespinasse's letters and many other documents tell us, did not go entirely by merit, but still there was enough of impartiality in the transaction to give deserving literary aspirants a very fair chance. It was by this means that La Harpe, to whom we must, I suppose, allow a certain amount of hopelessly ill-directed faculty, made his way, and it was by this means that Chamfort also made his way by overcoming La Harpe. He was at once launched in the literary society of the time, and succeeded well. He could make excellent love and tolerable literature, faculties which at that date rarely missed their due reward. Competent and not ill-natured judges—Diderot and Mademoiselle de Lespinasse herself—accuse him of not taking his triumphs as modestly as he might have done. But even this was hardly looked on as a demerit. Madame Helvétius, a nursing mother of the philosophers, gave him free board and lodgings at Sèvres; Chabanon, a sympathising literary man, made over to him a small but comfortable pension; and for many years, without more serious literary labours than the production of a few *éloges* and plays, he lived in the curious way in which people

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

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did then live, literally by his wit, if not by his wits.

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

At the Revolution, the violent anti-royalist part which he took surprised both sides. For some years he was, or pretended to be, the life and soul of the revolutionary party as far as wit went. He it is who claims the origination of the famous title of Sieyès' famous pamphlet on the Tiers État; he it was who formulated the equally famous *guerre aux châteaux, paix aux chaumières.* At one moment he was inspiring Mirabeau, at another he was being saluted in the clubs as "La Rochefoucauld-Chamfort." There is not, as it seems to me, any great mystery in his having taken this course. It is clear, from all we hear of him, that the stigma of his origin weighed heavily upon him, and that he, like many other sufferers from use and wont, looked on the Revolution as a moment of revenge. He seems also to have had a genuine belief in a good time coming. But he had little fanaticism in the matter, and his caustic tongue was guided chiefly by the *frondeur* spirit which has so often animated distinguished Frenchmen. After a time his witticisms began to take a dubiously patriotic turn. "Be my brother or I will kill you," was not a definition of revolutionary conduct likely to find favour with revolutionists. He was accused and imprisoned, released, but threatened with imprisonment again. Then he tried to make away with himself, but pistol and knife would not help him. He only

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succeeded in maiming and gashing himself in a ghastly fashion, and died after many days.

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

This horrible death figures in a most striking story, the *Prophecy of Cazotte*, which has often been told before, but is too remarkable to be omitted here. According to La Harpe —testimony, it should be remembered, given many years after the event—a brilliant company were collected, some time in the year 1788, at the house of some unnamed academician, who was also a man of high rank. Among them were assembled Chamfort, La Harpe himself, Condorcet, Bailly, Cazotte, the learned Vicq d'Azyr, Roucher, chief poet of the deplorable descriptive school which Saint-Lambert and Delille had introduced, and many others, with a plentiful admixture of merely fashionable company, and numerous ladies, with Madame de Grammont at their head. The company, if we may trust La Harpe, who had, it must be remembered, become at the time of writing violently orthodox (so that Marie Joseph Chénier contrasted his *feu céleste* with Naigeon's *feu d'enfer*), had been indulging in free feasting and free drinking of the kind recorded in fable of the Holbachians. Chamfort had read "impious and libertine tales," for which the reader of his works will not search in vain. A guest had informed the audience that he did not believe in the existence of God, and that he did believe that Homer was a fool. Another had cited with

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gusto the remark of his barber, "I am not a gentleman, sir; but I assure you I am not a bit more religious than if I were." Encouraged by these cheering instances, the company begin to forecast the good time coming. Suddenly Cazotte, who was known as an oddity and an *illuminé*, as well as from his admirable tale, the *Diable Amoureux*, breaks in. The good time *will* come, and he can tell them what its fruits will be. Condorcet will die self-poisoned on a prison floor; Chamfort will give himself a score of gashes in the vain hope of escaping from the Golden Age. As each guest, treating the matter at first as a joke, ironically asks for his own fate, the revelations grow more precise. Vicq d'Azyr, Bailly, Roucher have their evil fortunes told. At last the crowning moment of incredulity is reached when the prophet announces the fate of La Harpe. "La Harpe sera chrétien." The company are almost consoled when they think that their own misfortunes depend necessarily upon such an impossible contingency as this. But there is still an unpleasant impression from the gravity and the mystical reputation of the speaker. To dissipate it Madame de Grammont makes some light remark about the hardship which, by the conventions of society, prevents women from reaping the fruits of the Revolution. Cazotte replies to her promptly. There is no exemption for women in the Golden Age. She herself, her

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

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friends, and even her betters will share the fate of Bailly and Roucher. "At least," she cries, "you will give me the consolation of a confessor." "No," is the answer. "The last victim who will be so attended will die before you, and he will be the King of France." This is too much even for such an assembly, and the host interferes. But the valiant duchess is irrepressible. She asks Cazotte whether he alone is exempted from all these evils, and receives for answer only a gloomy quotation from Josephus, relating to the fate of the madman who at the siege of Jerusalem ended his forebodings by crying, "Woe to myself!" Then Cazotte makes his bow and leaves the room. Before six years had passed every word of his prophecy was fulfilled. Vicq d'Azyr had succeeded, and Chamfort had failed, in their attempts to copy the high Roman fashion. Roucher and Bailly and Madame de Grammont and the rest had looked through the dismal window, and Cazotte himself had been the hero of perhaps the most famous and most pitiful of the revolutionary legends. As for the Christianity of La Harpe, that perhaps is a question of definition.[1]

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

The history of Rivarol is curiously different. Chamfort is a distinctly melancholy figure: he is full of gall and wormwood; his life is passed half

[1] There has been an increasing tendency of late to take it for granted that this striking story was an invention of La Harpe's. If it be so, La Harpe was a much cleverer fellow than he appears in his undoubtedly original work.

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in attempts at great passions, and half in regrets at not achieving them, and his end is sinister and ghastly almost beyond comparison. His rival has nothing of this Timon-Heraclitus air about him. CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

Even less seems to be known of his youth (with the exception of the innkeeperhood of his father)[1] than of Chamfort's. But Rivarol was born in lawful wedlock about the middle of the century, and seems to have had some claims to nobility *à la mode de Gascogne*. He is, indeed, despite an alleged Italian origin, a Gascon all over: in his imperturbable self-conceit, in his determination to take all things at their best and sunniest, in his keen apprehension of the side on which his bread was buttered, and in a certain lightness and springiness of character which stood him in good stead. He began his literary career with somewhat formidable works—a translation of Dante's *Inferno*, with comments, and a *Discourse on the Universality of the French Tongue*. There is great literary promise in both these works; indeed Rivarol, merely as a writer, ranks far above Chamfort. The limited range and, at the same time, the inflated style of the period, is admirably shown in both the comment and the discourse. The essay which prefaced his Dante is very curious to read. It gives the idea of a man who is thoroughly aware of the weaknesses of his day, and thoroughly determined to fall in with them, though he himself does

[1] See note at beginning of this essay.

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not wholly share them. It has the suspicion of insincerity that nearly all his work has, but it gives an undoubted idea of power. Of the discourse, perhaps no better idea can be given than by the sentence in which the author expresses its essence, "La langue Française est la seule qui ait une probité attachée à son génie." It is impossible to imagine a cleverer and more audacious translation into the moral jargon of the time, of the simple statement that French is the clearest of European languages.

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

In the year before the Revolution, however, Rivarol tried a very different style. His *Petit Almanach de nos Grands Hommes pour l'année* 1788, an alphabetical handbook of authors, is one of the most venomous, but at the same time one of the most charming literary skits that have ever appeared. The mania for gorgeous appellations which had seized upon literary men, gave Rivarol plenty of handle, and to this day it is impossible to avoid laughing at the unlucky victims whose titles he discovered, or in some cases invented. There is M. Duhaussy de Robecourt, author of a touching poem with the refrain—

> Et je voudrais pour tout potage
> Des pommes cuites avec vous—

which must surely have inspired the author of *Doctor Syntax* with his equally touching but less famous romance of which each verse ends—

> Give me the table-flap, the mutton bone, and Mary.

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There is M. Fenouillot de Falbaire de Quingei, whose name alone ought to be sufficient to gain him a high rank in literature. There is M. de Saint-Ange, hero of the following exquisite quatrain, which Molière ought to have lived to hear— CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

> Rival d'Ovide et saint! Quel assemblage étrange!
> À l'heureux traducteur d'un tendre original
> Le nom de Saint paraît convenir assez mal.
> Mais ses vers ont prouvé qu'il a l'esprit d'un Ange!

It is needless to say that this publication provoked some rather warm displays of feeling from the brother men of letters, who found themselves classed with these fantastic personages. But before long the Revolution broke out, and Rivarol at once and without hesitation took the Royalist side. It does not appear that his motives were altogether sordid, and he was probably influenced to a great extent by the same hatred which his countryman, Gautier, afterwards bore and expressed to *la stupidité égalitaire.* His articles in the *Journal Politique National* are vigorous enough, and have the curious tone of laboured conviction which is characteristic of Rivarol's serious work, and of which one is at a loss to gauge the sincerity, though it induces us to believe him insincere. He very soon had occasion to leave the country, and spent the last ten years of his life in Brussels, London, Hamburg, and Berlin, rejoicing a good deal in the society first

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of a certain Manette, then of a Russian princess; writing a little under strong stress of publishers, and often delighting young Frenchmen who were introduced to him by the brilliancy of his conversation. It is to one of these neophytes that we owe not merely the best account of his ways, but also the preservation of some of the best of his good things. This was Chênedollé, an amiable man of letters, a poet as poets went between the days of André Chénier and of Lamartine, and the friend of Joubert, of Châteaubriand, and of a great many other persons more distinguished than himself. Rivarol died at Berlin in the spring of 1801, being then just fifty years old.

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

Before discussing the work from which these two men derived their principal and most permanent reputation, it may be well to say a very few words on the absolute and relative literary merit of their longer and more regular compositions. The fact that they were the two prominent swordsmen on the two opposing sides, has led to a good deal of partial judgment of them in France. Chamfort has sometimes been represented as a mere pander to the vicious tastes of the great; Rivarol as a scurrilous denizen of Grub Street, who adopted the Royalist side merely because it seemed likely to pay the best. Literary as well as moral value has been adjudged or denied to both in the same way. For my own part, and postponing the question of wit, I think that

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Rivarol has certainly the higher claims in matter of literature. Chamfort's serious productions are hardly readable nowadays. The plays are not readable at all. The *Tableaux de la Révolution* are feeble and wordy. The *Éloge* on Molière is a mere schoolboy performance, and that on La Fontaine, though very much better, is not up to the level of even good second-rate criticism. It is otherwise with M. le Comte de Rivarol. Sainte-Beuve acknowledges that he is *presque un grand écrivain*, and I venture to think that the *presque* expresses very close contiguity. But what is more remarkable about him even than his manner is his matter. His essay on the French language, his essay on Dante, are written with very insufficient knowledge, and from a critical standpoint entirely opposed to our present points of view. Yet it is remarkable how Rivarol's divination supplies his lack of knowledge; how just his thoughts are; how strikingly they differ from the accepted notions of the La Harpes and the Suards. His translation, or rather paraphrase, of the *Inferno*, shows him chiefly as a master of language; but the essays which precede it give him independent rank as a student and critic of thought.

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

We may now pass from the work which did not give our authors their reputation to that which did. This latter is of an exceedingly miscellaneous and in parts of a rather problematical kind. It consists partly of regular

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pensées or maxims of the kind produced by Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, Vauvenargues, and Joubert. But it consists also, and in still larger measure, of anecdotes and of actual conversation and table-talk collected and handed down by authorities more or less trustworthy. To this may perhaps be added the *Petit Almanach des Grands Hommes*, which Rivarol and Champcenetz launched at their contemporaries, and the axioms drawn from *De l'Homme*. The total has served hundreds of writers since the time of the originals as a quarry, or perhaps, to use a more appropriate metaphor, as a spice-box. Its contents rarely possess the weight and fulness of the great *pensée*-writers; the truths expressed are generally alloyed to no small extent, and there is much of mere personality and of the spite of the moment. But at its best the stuff displays an extraordinary quickness of intelligence and facility of wit, while even at its worst it has the merit of illuminating, not merely a dead state of society, but something which is living and not likely to die, the part or aspect of human nature which gave to that society most of its characteristic features.

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

Chamfort himself defines a maxim as a product of the labour of a clever man intended to spare fools trouble. The fools who should take his own efforts of the kind, and adopt them without examination, would certainly justify their title to the designation. There is always abundance

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of insight in them, but the insight is rarely directed to the whole of the subject. The two most famous of all his sayings are his definition of love and his remark as to the cleansing of Augean stables. It is noteworthy, however, that the former is usually given imperfectly, and that the latter is often altered so as to be hardly recognisable. When Chamfort asserted that "l'amour ce n'est que l'échange de deux fantaisies," and so forth, it was with the important qualification, "l'amour *tel qu'il existe dans la société*." When he asserted the necessary connection between revolution and violence, the phrase was not, as is so often said, "you cannot make revolutions with rosewater," but "you cannot cleanse the stable of Augeas with a dusting-brush." Of his more high-flown sayings, "Il faut recommencer la société humaine" is perhaps as fair a specimen as can be found. It is striking, and carefully abstains from committing the speaker to details; a frequent characteristic of Chamfort's political maxims. Here is one, however, of far sharper point and more definite aim: "La noblesse, disent les nobles, est un intermédiaire entre le Roi et le peuple. . . . Oui, comme le chien de chasse est intermédiaire entre le chasseur et les lièvres." It is remarkable, again, to find a professed man of letters aiming such a shot as this at a favourite literary paradox on politics. "There are people who pardon all the ill that

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

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priests have done, because had it not been for the priests we should never have had Tartuffe." On the whole, however, his political sayings seem to me his worst. They are animated, indeed, by a really genuine if not fanatical enthusiasm for the popular cause, and by a clear, and, as I think, on the whole unselfish comprehension of the evils of the old régime. But they are decidedly one-sided, and there are traces about them of the personal prejudices of a nameless man who felt himself injured, in rank if not in pocket, by a convention of society. This element of personality may probably account to some extent for the speedy revulsion which came over him, and made him so soon "suspect." Châteaubriand, who knew him, has remarked that he could not himself understand how Chamfort could ever have seriously espoused any political cause whatever. There must have been something in his manner which caused this wonder, for his language is expressive enough of conviction. A remarkable sourness reappears in his speeches on other subjects. He is always complaining—very unjustly as it seems in his own case—of the scanty encouragement given to men of letters. "Men of letters," he says, "are like peacocks, to whom a grain or two of corn is grudgingly thrown, and who are brought out now and then to show off their feathers, while cocks and hens and ducks and turkeys are stuffing their fill." But it is on

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

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another subject that, like most of his contemporaries, he is chiefly eloquent. The famous and already quoted definition of love might lead us to suppose him a mere cynic. He has, however, and not unfrequently, his moments of *sensibilité*. "Quelque mal qu'un homme puisse penser des femmes, il n'y a pas de femme qui n'en pense encore plus mal que lui," is one of his most savage sayings of the first kind, and it is abundantly supported by others.

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

"Avez-vous jamais connu une femme qui, voyant un de ses amis assidu auprès d'une autre femme, ait supposé que cette autre femme lui fut cruelle? On voit par là l'opinion qu'elles ont les unes des autres. Tirez vos conclusions."

"On n'est tout-à-fait la dupe d'une femme tant qu'elle n'est point la vôtre."

"On serait trop malheureux si auprès des femmes on se souvenait de ce qu'on sait par cœur."

On the other hand, the author of that other saying, "La pire des mésalliances est celle du cœur," cannot have been a mere railer, and there are many other signs in his work that he had had to choke down not a little sentiment. In almost all his miscellaneous *mots* there is a distinct undercurrent of sadness. "Il faut," he says in one place, "agir davantage, penser moins, et ne pas se regarder vivre." But it is clear that he did look at himself as he lived, and that the spectacle

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did not satisfy him. "Ce que j'ai appris je ne le sais plus, le peu que je sais je l'ai deviné" may be a remnant of his days of what Diderot called "suffisance bien conditionnée." He often speaks too of his "celebrity" as if it were a quite incontestable fact. Yet ten years before his death he could say that "he had lost the passions that rendered society supportable, and saw nothing in it but folly and wretchedness."

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

The most popular, however, and not the least interesting side of Chamfort's talent remains to be noticed. He has left us a collection of anecdotes which surpasses in vivacity, in keenness of observation, and in power of invention, anything else of the kind which exists. That in many, if not in most cases, the right of invention as well as of careful observation and witty expression is his, seems not doubtful. His anecdotes are, moreover, for the most part anecdotes with a purpose, and the purpose is to show the folly, the vanity, and the vices of the society which Chamfort knew so well and hated so much. It is impossible to read a single page of them without finding striking examples, but I can only quote a few of the happiest and most characteristic, and at the same time the least known. For there are not a few of Chamfort's sayings and stories which are already known by quotation to all the world. Out of the others might be composed a tableau of the later eighteenth century, its

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men of fashion and its men of letters, its actresses and its great ladies, its ceremonies and its philosophy. There is the noble academician, canvassed by a candidate who has insulted him forty years before, receiving him with the utmost politeness, complimenting him on his literary successes, and at last bowing him out with the words, "Adieu, M. le Comte, je vous félicite de n'avoir plus de mémoire." There is the man who refuses to marry his friend and beloved hostess because "he should not know where to spend his evenings." There is Broglie, the war-god, who is willing to allow that *ce Voltaire* has written one good line:

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

Le premier qui fut roi fut un soldat heureux.

Or we find ourselves back in the sacred precincts of the Academy—for Chamfort is never tired of girding at his colleagues—and a member is proposing "that not more than four persons be allowed to speak at once"; while Fontenelle, when the question is whether a certain stingy Immortal has or has not paid his subscription, and the good-natured collector remarks, "I believe he did, but I did not see it," rejoins, "I did see it, but I don't believe it." Sometimes the sarcasm flies higher. We are told of the programme of a Cour Plénière which was drawn up for Louis XV., containing not only the remarks that the King was to make, but also stage directions.

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"Here the King will assume an air of severity": "At this point his majesty's countenance will unbend itself," and so forth. Elsewhere it is the courtier who defies his enemies to supplant him, "Il n'y a personne ici plus valet que moi." Or, once more, Louis the Wellbeloved lies on his death-bed, indignantly protesting with his last breath against the uncourtly doctor who says to him, "You must" do so and so. Of one story Madame Denis, Voltaire's unlucky niece, is the heroine. She is modestly deprecating praises for her acting in *Zaïre*. "One ought to be young and beautiful for that," she says. "Ah! madame," replies her well-meaning flatterer, "you have proved the contrary." Then we have the following miracle of the ridiculous-pathetic which deserves quotation at length:

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

"Madame de H—— me racontait la mort de M. le Duc d'Aumont. 'Cela a tourné bien court,' disait-elle. 'Deux jours auparavant M. Bonvard lui avait permis de manger, et le jour même de sa mort, deux heures avant la récidive de sa paralysie, il était comme à trente ans, comme il avait été toute sa vie. Il avait demandé son perroquet, avait dit 'Brossez ce fauteuil,' 'Voyons mes deux broderies nouvelles,' enfin toute sa tête, toutes ses idées comme à l'ordinaire.'" Does not this conquer a place among stories of the lightning before death? Nor even after this does the gallery lose its charms. There is the courtier

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who in unconscious contrast to Massillon's famous opening, remarked at the death of Louis XIV., "Après la mort d'un roi on peut tout croire." Yet a little and we are grieved to hear that Voltaire actually spoke of the divine Emily as "Un cochon qui n'a pas d'organes, qui ne sait pas ce que c'est que l'harmonie." That the majority of the anecdotes are, as this clearly is, ill-natured, is almost to be expected. But what is remarkable about Chamfort is that there is little malice, in the French sense of the word, about him. It is difficult to believe that his unrivalled collection of pathological illustrations gave him the very slightest delight. There is no laugh in them, though they have made so many hundreds of people laugh since they were written and told. The *saeva indignatio* has come upon the satirist, and scorn has apparently ceased to provide him with any pleasure. One is always expecting Chamfort to change his tone and become a preacher in earnest, bewailing and lamenting instead of merely girding at the follies and vices of his time. The shadow of his death seems to reach backwards.

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

With this melancholy temperament and sombre habit of thought, the light and mercurial carelessness of Rivarol is in striking contrast. I have said that he seems to me to possess greater literary powers than Chamfort, and a greater faculty of thinking justly on most subjects, if not on any

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CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

given subject. But whereas Chamfort is frequently sincere, Rivarol hardly knows what sincerity is. He is not consciously or intentionally false, but it becomes very soon evident to his readers that, with immense power of appreciation, he is almost incapable of being really convinced. I have said that his adoption of the Royalist cause does not seem to have been the act of a mere hireling. His acuteness foresaw that the popular party was likely to have some very disagreeable experiences, and that there would be for some time little room there for persons who took merely sarcastic and apolaustic views of life. Whatever may have been his real claim to a place among the nobility, his tastes and his convictions (such as they were) threw him on their side. This had its inconveniences. There is an admirable story which is told, for a wonder, at his expense. Rivarol in the early days of the Revolution had been expatiating on the loss of "nos titres, nos droits," and so forth. Hereat his hearer was heard to mutter *Nos!* with a slight accent of wonder. "Qu'est-ce que vous trouvez là de singulier?" said the Gascon sharply. "C'est le pluriel, mon cher, que je trouve singulier," replied the other. As a rule, however, it was not Rivarol who played the part of butt in such matters. With less venom than Chamfort, he had an almost unequalled knack of saying insolent things. His remark to the unlucky author of a single couplet, "C'est fort bien,

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mais il y a des longueurs," is perhaps the best known of all his sayings. And one can imagine the cordial hatred which must have been generally felt towards a man who, meeting the harmless Florian with a manuscript sticking out of his pocket, could exclaim, "Ah, monsieur, si on ne vous connaissait pas on vous volerait." CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

"Condorcet writes with laudanum on lead paper" is not an extraordinary witticism. But this on the funeral sermons of a certain Abbé de Vauxcelles is again admirable. "On ne sent jamais mieux le néant de l'homme que dans la prose de cet orateur." "Champcenetz c'est mon clair de lune" is a specimen of the amiable speeches he gave to his chief literary coadjutor, himself no despicable wit, who, after his condemnation by the revolutionary tribunal, asked Fouquier-Tinville "whether one could make arrangements for a substitute?" The historian Rulhière, who was one of the most unpopular of men, is said to have complained to Rivarol one day of his ill-repute, remarking, "Je n'ai jamais fait qu'une méchanceté dans ma vie." "Quand finira-t-elle?" was the answer. Some of his less ferocious replies are even better, as this criticism of an epigrammatist, "Ses épigrammes font honneur à son cœur," where it would be impossible to select more ingeniously the praise which damns. As a specimen of the success with which he could play the devil's advocate, nothing perhaps can

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surpass a criticism of Voltaire reported by Chênedollé. Rivarol, it seems, fully admitted the excellence of the great man's lighter poems, but said, "His 'Henriade' is only a meagre sketch, a skeleton of an epic, destitute of sinew, and flesh, and colour. His tragedies are philosophical exercises, brilliant but cold. In his style there is always something dead: while in Virgil and Racine all is alive. The 'Essai sur les Mœurs et l'Esprit des Nations,' a paltry parody on Bossuet's immortal discourse, is only an outline, elegant enough, but dull, dry, and misleading. As for his pompously named Philosophical Dictionary, it is a book of little reach or weight in philosophy. To imagine that the thought of Voltaire cannot be surpassed is to prove one's own thought excessively limited. Nothing can be more imperfect than his manner of thinking. It is empty, superficial, tending only to mockery and dissolution, good to destroy and nothing more. There is neither depth in it, nor height, nor unity, nor *future*, nothing capable of serving as a foundation, or as a bond."

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

This is unfair and extravagant, no doubt, but it is remarkable how it contains in essence almost everything which has since been said against its subject. In Rivarol's terser maxims the same acuteness, the same felicity of expression, and occasionally the same suspicion of unfairness and insincerity appear. Many of these are scattered

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about his longer works, and among them one may often find sayings which under other guise have become well known. "Le lecteur trouve toujours la peine que l'écrivain ne s'est pas donné," is a better, if less laconic, expression of the truth whose English clothing is attributed to Sheridan. Rivarol has left, in one form or another, a considerable number of *pensées*, in which his admiration for Montesquieu and Pascal, the two authors whom he prized most, is evident enough. Some of them suffer from a frequent sin in *pensée*-writing; they are too ambitious. Thus, the following: "Flambeau de la langage et de tous les arts, la métaphysique éclaire, indique, et ne fait pas," is little more than an ingenious conceit. But this cannot always be objected against his serious thoughts. The same metaphorical tinge is observable in another of the same class, but there is more in the metaphor: "Le temps est le rivage de l'esprit; tout passe devant lui et nous croyons que c'est lui qui passe." "The imagination is the mistress of the future" has a somewhat mystic sound, but "On n'a pas le droit d'une chose impossible" is excellent both in matter and form. Some of his political axioms are still more remarkable. "La politique est comme le Sphinx de la fable, elle dévore tous ceux qui n'expliquent pas ses énigmes" is one of those sayings which have many claimants. But the following is original

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

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enough, and, in the case of France, remarkably prophetic. "Les corps politiques recommencent sans cesse: ils ne vivent que de remèdes." When we come to the remark, "Le corps politique est comme un arbre; à mesure qu'il s'élève il a autant besoin du ciel que de la terre," it is perhaps not uncharitable to suppose that this was written when Rivarol had been, at any rate for political purposes, converted. Here, again, is a saying worthy of note: "Les souverains ne doivent jamais oublier qu'un écrivain peut recruter parmi des soldats, et qu'un général ne peut jamais recruter parmi les lecteurs"; while the following, on the other side, shows a power of recognising a fact which the contemporaries of the author forgot to their cost: "Les peuples les plus civilisés sont aussi voisins de la barbarie que le fer le plus poli l'est de la rouille." Here, again, appears the cynic: "Il faut plutôt pour opérer une révolution une certaine masse de bêtise de l'une part qu'une certaine dose de lumière de l'autre." But Rivarol did not spare his friends. He said of the Allies, "Ils ont toujours été en arrière d'une année, d'une armée, et d'une idée," and of the nobles, "Ils prennent leurs souvenirs pour des droits." The *Lettre à la Noblesse*, written when Brunswick's victorious advent was confidently expected, is a really admirable appeal for moderation and justice in the moment of presumed victory.

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

His religious maxims have the air of being

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made to order, but fortunately there are few of them. In ethics he is more copious, and on both these subjects his chief utterances are to be found in a series of letters to Necker, who was one of his chosen objects of attack. There is, however, in some of his moral sentences a fair measure of the spirit of La Rochefoucauld. "L'indulgence pour ceux qu'on connaît est bien plus rare que la pitié pour ceux qu'on ne connaît pas" is not unworthy of the great anatomist of the seventeenth century. The following, too, from the Treatise "de l'Homme," a strange mixture of dulness and vivacity, is a fine image: "Les pavots de la vieillesse s'interposent entre la vie et la mort pour nous faire oublier l'une et nous assoupir sur l'autre." In another saying, verbally good as it is, Rivarol is surely unjust towards his century. "Que pouvait faire," he asks, "le bon sens dans un siècle malade de métaphysique où l'on ne permettait plus le bonheur de se présenter sans preuves?" This is probably the only time that the eighteenth century has ever been charged with too great nicety in its admittance of things enjoyable. In dealing with literary subjects we might expect greater copiousness from a lover of letters and of language such as Rivarol, who, like Gautier and some other writers, had a genuine affection for words in themselves. His remarks on this head are valuable, but do not seem to have been preserved in any great numbers. Of these sayings

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

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on language I have already quoted one, the rather too rhetorical remark about the probity of the French tongue. Others have to do with the question of the relation between language and thought, but there is one on grammar which deserves citation. "La grammaire étant l'art de lever les difficultés d'une langue, il ne faut pas que le levier soit plus lourd que le fardeau." There might be a disposition nowadays to dispute this definition of grammar, but hardly any one will dispute the shrewdness and the necessity of the accompanying caution. Elsewhere are to be found some comparisons between "l'esprit" and "le talent," which show that Rivarol attached a rather unusual meaning to the many-sensed word *esprit*. He seems to mean by it the understanding in its widest sense, while he gives to "talent" the equivalent, or pretty nearly the equivalent of "faculty of expression." Shorter maxims are often remarkable, such as "Le génie égorge ceux qu'il pille"; "Plus d'un écrivain est persuadé qu'il a fait penser son lecteur quand il l'a fait suer." "Celui qui pour être naïf emprunte une phrase d'Amyot, demanderait pour être brave l'armure de Bayard." This last sally, despite its wit, shows that Rivarol was not superior to his contemporaries in his knowledge and understanding of the ancient literature of France. But perhaps the best measure of his faculty is to be found in some remarks on Shakespeare. It does not appear that these remarks were founded

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

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on any real knowledge of the poet, and Rivarol was too much a man of his time to divine fully the phenomenon which he was not able, or did not care to examine. But his view is exactly that which a man of great faculty would take of Shakespeare, from secondhand knowledge of what had been said of him by enthusiasts on the one side, and detractors on the other.

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

There are few anecdotes recorded of Rivarol's telling. "Dieu de la conversation," and "Saint Georges de l'épigramme," as his admirers called him, his speech does not seem to have been that of the *raconteur*. His faculty, in short, was almost entirely critical, and he knew it so well that he abstained from any attempt at constructive work, except on the smallest scale. He was a born journalist and reviewer, and perhaps under pressure he might have made a historian. But it is difficult to imagine him either poet, dramatist, or writer of fiction. Chamfort, on the other hand, had novel-writing come into fashion in his days, might very well have anticipated Charles de Bernard, though his graver would have drawn deeper lines.

To weigh either of these men in the balance, and assign them their exact place among writers, is not very easy. As we have seen, nothing that they did of any magnitude, with a partial exception in the case of some work of Rivarol's, deserves high estimate. We are therefore forced to judge

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them by their maxims, independent or imbedded in larger works, by their reported conversation, and by doubtful and treacherous collections of apophthegms and anecdotes. Now *pensée*-writing, even at its best, is a kind of composition peculiarly hard to value. The paucity of words which it necessarily affects may be suggestive of much thought: on the other hand it may serve to conceal the want of any thought at all. The writer of *pensées* always and legitimately claims that his readers shall read between the lines, and sometimes it seems as if he relied a little too much on this license. There is also a vast amount of mere trick in this style of composition. Let any man of fair ability and some knack of writing spend a few days over La Rochefoucauld and Joubert, and he will find himself almost unconsciously framing sentences on their model, the goodness or badness of which he can hardly, for the time at least, estimate. In these two writers there is scarcely any alloy, but the same can hardly be said of any other composers of maxims, and it certainly cannot be said of the two who are before us. To write *pensées* with supreme felicity there is required, either such long experience and keen observation of men as La Rochefoucauld and Chesterfield possessed, or else such familiarity with books, and such a habit of meditation, as was the equipment of Pascal and Joubert. Neither Chamfort nor Rivarol possessed either of these advantages in

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

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the highest degree. They knew men, but only from the outside, and from certain limited, superficial, and accidental points of view. They knew books too, but their knowledge was circumscribed by the fashions of a time which, whatever its other merits may have been, was a time as little favourable to literary criticism and valuation as any that the world has seen. Hence their axioms are rather personal than general, rather amusing than instructive, rather showing the acuteness and ingenuity of the authors than able to throw light on the subjects dealt with. As mere tellers of anecdotes and sayers of sharp things they have indeed had few rivals, and rich as French literature is in this class, the hundred pages or so of Chamfort's *Characters and Portraits* contain almost as much wealth as all other writers can make up between them. In this point there is no comparison between the two, and if Chamfort yields to Rivarol as a writer, as a tale-teller in miniature he has absolutely no rival.

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

The singular difference between the promise and the performance, the fame and the deeds of both our authors, naturally invites another consideration. How far were circumstances responsible for what they did and for what they did not do? As a rule I must confess that this inquiry seems to me an idle one, but in this case it has its appositeness. It is difficult for any one who studies them to miss an extraordinarily nineteenth

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century flavour in both. It is said, indeed, that Rivarol had conceived in his Gascon head a notion that Voltaire had done him a deadly injury by getting himself born half a century earlier, and filling the place which otherwise he, Rivarol, would have filled. To me, however, it seems that both Rivarol and his rival and enemy, Chamfort, were born not too late but too early. They had not the creative genius which enables a man to produce good and original work at any time that he may occur. They were of the second or third order, the order which simply falls in more or less with the prevalent ideas and the fashionable forms of its time. Now the literary forms and ideas of the last quarter of the eighteenth century in France must be admitted by any competent and impartial judge to have been nearly hopeless. Tragedies and comedies where every scene, almost every situation and speech, was taken from a recognised catalogue; *éloges* which simply adapted this author and that to certain specified and accepted canons; poems which were verse-exercises done to scale—these were the chief of them. No one who had not genius to break away from these, or genius to transform them, could produce literary work of the first or even of the second class. Forty or fifty years later, both would have found open to them careers for which they were admirably adapted. Rivarol's powers of style and faculty of appreciation would have made him a rival on the

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

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one side to Mérimée, on the other to Sainte-Beuve, to both of whom he bears some points of resemblance. Chamfort, with his smaller literary faculty, possessed, besides his narrative ability, a germ of political enthusiasm which might have made him a statesman or at least a great orator, and a vein of discontented sentiment which might have produced good work of the melancholy-moralist sort. It is obvious, too, that both were above all things suited for contributing to periodical literature, the special employment of political literary men in this century. When that literature is reviled, as it often is, for turning away spirits and talents capable of doing better work, it is only fair to reckon on the other side the good work it has produced from those who would otherwise have been more or less sterile. Chamfort and Rivarol are examples of such actual historical sterility—neither felt the vocation to produce a *magnum opus*, and to neither was the opportunity open of producing numerous interesting opuscula. It would lead us too far from our subject to apply the reverse method and consider the authors, both in English and in French literature, of the last seventy years who would have been equally sterile, or yet more sterile, but for the impulse and employment which these men lacked.

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

In what they did, however, imperfect as it may be, there is, after all, a charm and an interest which is not to be overlooked. They were among

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CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

the last (for Joubert, it must be remembered, was their contemporary, born only a year or two after Rivarol, though his posthumous work appeared so much later) of a great and characteristic school of writers. Since them, with the single exception just noticed, no one has made his mark by maxim or apophthegm, and it may be doubted whether any one will do so until society and literature have again gone through some notable changes. Not destitute of serious import and value, they offer at the same time almost unequalled pasture to the merely idle mind that delights in play of words and wit. They have, too, what may be called the merit of making an end. They were the natural outcome of a brilliant, fastidious, and enlightened society, which at last became, in matter of literature, too enlightened to dare to make a mistake, and too fastidious to risk imperfect work. Their personality is unusually vivid. Almost without the aid of biographers we can see Rivarol, with the curiously innocent smirk which his portrait wears, remarking that "Florian's works consist of nearly as many blank pages as printed ones. It is lucky, too," he adds, "for the blank pages are far the best." We can hear Chamfort, in a brilliant society, recounting the misfortunes of his colleague, who, in the words of the ballad, "came home at e'en, and found a man where no man should be." He tells how the culprit, in the true spirit of his father Adam, upbraids his partner

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in the misdeed. "Quand je vous disais, madame, qu'il était temps que je m'en aille!" "Que je m'en *allasse*, monsieur," cries the scandalised academician, his feelings as a husband vanishing before his sensitiveness as a grammarian. Their works exactly give the two men. Rivarol, a man of indifferent breeding, of little delicacy, of few illusions, keenly alive to the main chance, and possessing a gladiatorial faculty of fighting on this side or on that, but of fine though intolerant literary taste, and of unexampled powers of malign epigram. Chamfort, thoroughly versed in the ways of society, though not born to it, prone to throw his thought into anecdote rather than reflection, tired of the world and yet anxious to keep in with it and suit its tastes, scornful of his fellows and yet entertaining at heart almost fantastic views of the possibilities of human progress, and of the abstract rights of humanity.

CHAMFORT AND RIVAROL.

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III

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IN the days when I had to study the two great Histories of Greece which England produced in the last generation, a thought, which has most probably often presented itself to other students, frequently occurred to me. Much as the two works differ in plan, in views, and in manner of execution, their difference never struck me so much as in the point of style. And the remarkable feature of this difference is, that it is not by any means the natural variation which we allow for, and indeed expect, in the productions of any two men of decided and distinct literary ability. It is not as the difference between Hume and Gibbon, or the difference between Clarendon and Taylor. In the styles of these great writers, and in those of many others, there is the utmost conceivable diversity; but at the same time they are all styles. We can see (we see it, indeed, so clearly that we hardly take the trouble to think about it)

[1] See Preface and Essay I.

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that each of them made a distinct effort to arrange his words into their clause, his clauses into their sentence, and his sentences into their paragraph according to certain forms, and that though these forms varied in the subtle and indescribable measure of the taste and idiosyncrasy of each writer, the effort was always present, and was only accidentally if inseparably connected with the intention to express certain thoughts, to describe certain facts, or to present certain characters. But when we come to compare Thirlwall with Grote, we find not a variation of the kind just mentioned, but the full opposition of the presence of style on the one hand and the absence of it on the other. The late Bishop of St. David's will probably never be cited among the greatest masters of English prose style, but still we can see without difficulty that he has inherited its traditions. It would be difficult, on the other hand, to persuade a careful critic that Grote ever thought of such things as the cadence of a sentence or the composition of a paragraph. That he took so much trouble as might suffice to make his meaning clear and his language energetic is obvious; that in no case did he look beyond this is, I think, certain.

MODERN ENGLISH PROSE 1876.

But the difference between these two great historians is very far from being a mere isolated fact. It marks with extraordinary precision the date and nature of a change which has affected English literature to a degree and in a manner

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worthy of the most serious consideration. What this change is, and whether it amounts to an actual decay or to a mere temporary neglect of style in English prose writing, are questions which are certainly of importance, and the answers to which should not, as it seems to me, lack interest.

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If, then, we take up almost any book of the last century, we shall find that within varying limits the effort of which I have just spoken is distinctly present. The model upon which the writer frames his style may be and probably is faulty in itself, and still more probably is faultily copied; there may be too much Addison in the mixture, or too much Johnson; but still we shall see that an honest attempt at style, an honest endeavour at manner as apart from matter, has been made, however clumsy the attempt may be, and however far short of success it may fall. But if we take up any book of the last forty or fifty years, save a very few, the first thing that will strike us is the total absence of any attempt or endeavour of the kind. The matter will, as a rule, have been more or less carefully attended to, and will be presented to the reader with varying degrees of clearness and precision. But the manner, except in so far as certain peculiarities of manner may be conducive or prejudicial to clearness and precision of statement—sometimes perhaps to apparent precision with any sacrifice of clearness—will in most cases be found to have

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been totally neglected, if a thing may be said to be neglected which does not appear to have even presented itself within the circumference of the field of view. In other words, and to adopt a convenient distinction, though there may be a difference of manner, there is usually no difference of style, for there is no style at all.

Before going any further, it may be well to follow a commendable, if antiquated and scholastic practice, and to set down accurately what is here meant by style, and of what it consists. Style is the choice and arrangement of language with only a subordinate regard to the meaning to be conveyed. Its parts are the choice of the actual words to be used, the further selection and juxtaposition of these words, the structure of the clauses into which they are wrought, the arrangement of the clauses into sentences, and the composition of the sentences into paragraphs. Beyond the paragraph style can hardly be said to go, but within that limit it is supreme. The faults incident to these parts (if I may be allowed still to be scholastic) are perhaps also worthy of notice. Every one can see, though every one is by no means careful to put his knowledge into practice, that certain words are bad of themselves, and certain others to be avoided wherever possible. The next stage introduces difficulties of a higher order, though these also are more or less elementary, such as combination of incongruous notions

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and unintentional repetitions of the same word. But these are mere rudiments; it is in the breach or neglect of the rules that govern the structure of clauses, of sentences, and of paragraphs that the real secret of style consists, and to illustrate this breach or observation is less easy. The task will be perhaps made easier if we consider first, in the rough, how the prevalent English style of the present day differs from that of past times.

MODERN ENGLISH PROSE 1876.

De Quincey, when the century was not yet at the midmost of its way, had already noticed and deplored the deterioration of which we speak. In his Essay on Style more particularly, as well as in other places, he undertakes to discuss at some length the symptoms and causes of the disease. Now De Quincey, as any one who is at all acquainted with his works is aware, gave considerable attention to the subject of style, and professed to be no mean authority thereon. There were, indeed, two peculiarities about him which prevented him from deserving the highest place as a referee on such matters. The first was his mistaken idea that extremely ornate prose—the prose which his ally John Wilson called "numerous," and which others have called Asiatic—was the highest form attainable, and that any writer who did not aim at this fell naturally into a lower class. The other was his singular crotchetiness, which made him frequently refuse to see any good in the style of writers to whom, for some reason or for no reason,

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he had taken a dislike. It will probably be allowed, not merely by persons who hold traditional opinions, but by all independent students of literature, that we must look with considerable distrust on the dicta of a critic who finds fault with the styles of Plato and of Conyers Middleton. The Essay on Style, however (at least its first part, for the latter portions go off into endless digressions of no pertinence whatever), is much more carefully written and much more carefully reasoned than most of De Quincey's work. The purport of it is, that the decay of style is to be attributed partly to the influence of German literature, but chiefly to the prevalence of journalism. No one will deny that the influence of newspaper writing is in many ways bad, and that to it is due much of the decadence in style of which complaint is made. But either the prevalent manner of journalism has undergone a remarkable change during the past generation, or else the particular influence which De Quincey supposes it to have had was mistaken by him. I do not myself pretend to a very intimate acquaintance with the periodical literature of the second quarter of this century, and I am afraid that not even in the pursuit of knowledge could I be tempted to plunge into such a dreary and unbuoyant *mare mortuum*. With respect to the papers of to-day it is certainly not difficult to discern some peculiarities in their styles, or in what does duty for style in them.

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But in most of all this we shall find little to bear out De Quincey's verdict. Long and involved sentences, unduly stuffed with fact and meaning, are what he complains of; and though there is no doubt that we should not have to go far in order to find such at the present day, yet it does not appear, to me at least, that the main fault of contemporary English style is of this kind. On the contrary, the sin of which I should chiefly complain is the sin of over-short sentences, of mere gasps instead of balanced periods. Such a paragraph as the following will illustrate what I mean: "That request was obeyed by the massacre of six out of the surviving princes of the imperial family. Two alone escaped. With such a mingling of light and darkness did Constantine close his career." I think that any one who considers this combination of two mutilated clauses with an interjectional copula, and who perceives with what ease its hideous cacophony might have been softened into a complete and harmonious sentence, must feel certain that its present form is to some extent intentional. The writer might very well have written: "That request was obeyed by the massacre of six out of the eight surviving princes of the imperial family, and the career of Constantine was closed in a mixture of light and darkness." Why did he not?

Again, let us take a book of recent [1876] date, whose style has received considerable praise

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both in England and abroad—Mr. Green's *Short History of the English People.* The character of Elizabeth is perhaps the most carefully written, certainly the most striking, passage in the book, and contains a most elaborate statement of that view of the great queen which many historical students now take. It enforces this view with the greatest energy, and sets it before us in every detail and difference of light and shade. But how inartistic it is! how thoroughly bad in conception, composition, and style! In the first place it occupies some seven printed pages of unusual extent and closeness, each of which is at least equal to two of the ordinary octavo pages of an English classic author. Let any one, if he can, imagine one of the great masters who could both draw and compose—Hume or Middleton, Clarendon or Swift—giving us a character of fourteen pages. A portrait on the scale of Brobdingnag, with all features and all defects unnaturally emphasised and enlarged, could hardly be more disgusting.[1]

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It is not necessary to multiply examples, which,

[1] I cannot refrain from noticing an instance from this writer of the absurdity into which the passion for picturesque epithet betrays many contemporary authors. At Newbury, we are told, "the London train bands flung Rupert's horsemen *roughly* off their front of pikes." Here *roughly* is in the Polonian sense "good." Visions of the sturdy and pious citizen discomfiting the debauched cavalier are aroused. But let us consider it with the sobriety proper to history and to art, and perhaps we shall ask Mr. Green to show us how to

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if all the defects of contemporary style were to be noticed and illustrated, would occupy a space longer than the present chapter. In all but a very few writers we shall observe with certain variations the same defects—inordinate copiousness of treatment combined with an utter inability, or at best an extreme unwillingness, to frame a sentence of due proportion and careful structure. It should certainly be possible to trace the origin and examine the nature of a phenomenon so striking and so universal.

The secret of the manner will not long escape us if we notice or can disengage the intention with which, willingly or unwillingly, this manner has been adopted. Nor is this intention very hard to discover. It is, as it appears to me, a desire to present the subject, whatever it may be, to the reader in the most striking and arresting fashion. The attention of the reading public generally has, from causes to be presently noticed, become gradually concentrated almost wholly upon subject-matter. Among what may be called, intellectually speaking, the lower classes, this concentration shows itself not in the preference but in the exclusive study of novels, newspapers, and sometimes of so-called books of information. A book must be, as they say, "about something," or it fails

fling an enemy *softly* off a pike. Roaring like a sucking-dove would be nothing to this gymnastic effort. [It is now (1892) unfortunately impossible to ask him. But the instance is too characteristic to be omitted.]

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altogether to arrest their attention. To such persons a page with (as it has been quaintly put) no "resting-places," no proper names and capital letters to fix the eye, is an intolerable weariness, and to them it is evident that style can be only a name. Somewhat above them come the (intellectually) middle classes. They are not absolutely confined to personal adventure, real or fictitious, or to interesting facts. They can probably enjoy the better class of magazine articles, superior biographies, travels, and the other books that everybody reads and nobody buys. This class will even read poetry if the poet's name be known, and would consider it a grave affront if it were hinted to them that their appreciation of style is but dull and faulty. A certain amount of labour is therefore required on work which is to please these readers: labour, however, which is generally bestowed in a wrong direction, on ornament and trick rather than on really artistic construction and finish. Lastly there is the highest class of all, consisting of those who really possess, or might possess, taste, culture, and intellect. Of these the great majority are now somewhat alienated from pure literature, and devoted rather to social matters, to science, or to the more fashionable and profitable arts of design. Their demand for style in literature is confined chiefly to poetry. They also are interested more by their favourite subjects treated anyhow, than

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by subjects for which they care little treated well, so that even by them little encouragement is given to the cultivation and little hindrance to the decay of prose style.

MODERN ENGLISH PROSE 1876.

Intimately connected with the influences that arise from this attitude and temper of the general reader, are some other influences which spring from such prevalent forms and subjects of literature as present themselves to the general writer. The first of these forms, and unquestionably the most constant and pervading in its influence, is now, as it was in De Quincey's days, journalism. No one with the slightest knowledge of the subject will pretend that the influence of journalism upon writing is wholly bad. Whatever may have been the case formerly, a standard of excellence which is in some respects really high is usually aimed at, and not seldom reached, in the better class of newspapers. Some appropriateness in the use of words, a rigid avoidance of the more glaring grammatical errors, and a respectable degree of clearness in statement, are expected by the reader and usually observed by the writer. In these respects, therefore, there is no falling off to be complained of, but rather a marked improvement upon past times to be perceived. Yet, as regards the higher excellences of style, it is not possible that the influence of journalism should be good. For it must at any cost be rapid, and rapidity is absolutely incompatible with style. The journalist

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has as a rule one of two things to do; he has either to give a rapid account of certain facts, or to present a rapid discussion of certain arguments. In either case it becomes a matter of necessity for him to adopt stereotyped phrases and forms of speech which, being ready cut and dried, may abbreviate his labour and leave him as little as possible to invent in his limited time. Now there is nothing more fatal to the attainment of a good style than the habit of using such stereotyped phrases and forms. With the imperiousness natural to all art, style absolutely refuses to avail itself of, or to be found in company with, anything that is ready made. The rule must be a leaden one, the mould made for the occasion, and broken after it has passed. Every one who has ever seriously tried to write must be conscious how sorely he has been beset, and how often he has been overcome, by the almost insensible temptation to adopt the current phrases of the day. Bad, however, as the influence of journalism is in this respect, it is perhaps worse in its tendency to sacrifice everything to mere picturesqueness of style (for the word must be thus misused because there is no other). The journalist is bound to be picturesque by the law of his being. The old phrase, *segnius irritant*, is infinitely truer of pseudo-picturesque style as compared with literature which holds to its proper means of appeal, than it is of literal spectacle as compared with

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narrative. And the journalist is obliged at any cost *irritare animos*, and that in the least possible time.

MODERN ENGLISH PROSE 1876.

This tendency of journalism is assisted and intensified by that of another current form of literature, novel-writing. A very little thought will show that if the novel-writer attains to style it is almost a marvel. Of the four constituent elements of the novel,—plot, character, description, and dialogue,—none lend themselves in any great degree to the cultivation of the higher forms of style, and some are distinctly opposed to it. The most cunning plot may be developed equally in the style of Plato and in the style of a penny dreadful. Character drawing, as the novelist understands or should understand it, is almost equally unconnected with style. On the other hand, description and dialogue, unless managed with consummate skill, distinctly tend to develop and strengthen the crying faults of contemporary style: its picturesqueness at any cost, its gasping and ungraceful periods, its neglect of purely literary effect.

Lastly, there must be noticed the enormous influence necessarily exerted by the growth of what is called scientific study (to use the term in its largest and widest sense), and by the displacement in its favour of many, if not most, of the departments of literature which were most favourable to the cultivation of style. In whatever quarter we look, we shall see that the primary effort

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of the writer and the primary desire of the reader are both directed to what are called scientific or positive results, in other words, to matter instead of manner. In using the word science here, I have not the slightest intention of limiting its meaning, as it is too often limited, to physical science. I extend it to every subject which is capable of being treated in a scientific way. And I think we shall find that all subjects and all kinds of prose literature which are not capable of this sort of treatment, or do not readily lend themselves to it, are yearly occupying less and less the attention of both artists and audiences. Parliamentary oratory of the elaborate kind, which furnished a vigorous if a somewhat dangerous stimulant to the cultivation of style, is dead utterly. Pulpit eloquence, which at its worst maintained "stylistic" traditions, and at its best furnished some of the noblest examples of style, is dying, partly owing to the gradual divorce between the best men of the universities and the clerical profession, partly to the absence of the serene security of a settled doctrine and position, but most of all to the demands upon the time of the clergy which modern notions enforce, and which make it utterly impossible for the greater number to devote a proper time to study. Philosophy, another great nurse of style, has now turned stepmother, and turns out her nurselings to wander in "thorniest queaches" of terminology and jargon, instead of

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the ordered gardens wherein Plato and Berkeley walked. History even, the last or almost the last refuge of a decent and comely prose, is more busy about records and manuscripts than about periods and paragraphs. Only criticism, the youngest and most hopeful birth of time as far as prose style is concerned, has not yet openly apostatized. It is true that even here signs of danger are not wanting, and that already we are told that criticism must be scientific, that its reading must not be desultory, and so forth. But on the whole there is little fear of relapse. The man who would cut himself a coat from another's cloth must bring to the task the care and labour of a skilled fashioner if he is to make good his claim of ownership. The man who has good work in perpetual contemplation is not likely to be satisfied with the complacent production of what is bad.

MODERN ENGLISH PROSE 1876.

There is, moreover, one influence, or rather one set of influences, hostile to the attainment of style in the present day which I have as yet left unnoticed, and the approach to which is guarded by ground somewhat dangerous to the tread. It will, I think, appear to any one who contemplates the subject fully and impartially that style is essentially an aristocratic thing; and it is already a commonplace to say that the spirit of to-day, or perhaps the spirit of the times immediately behind us, is essentially democratic. It is democratic not in any mere political sense, but in the intolerance

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with which it regards anything out of the reach of, or incomprehensible to, the ordinary Philistine, working by the methods of Philistia. Intellectual and artistic pre-eminence, except in so far as it ministers to the fancies of the vulgar (great or small), is perhaps especially the object of this intolerance. Every one has witnessed or shared the angry impatience with which the ordinary Briton resents anything esoteric, fastidious, or fine. And the charms of prose style especially merit these epithets, and are not to be read by any one who runs, or tasted by any one who swallows in haste. Gaudy ornament is intelligible, "graphic" drawing is intelligible; but the finer cadences of the period, the more intricate strokes of composition, fall unregarded on the common ear and pass unnoticed by the common eye. To be tickled, to be dazzled, to be harrowed, are impressions of which the uncultured man is capable; they require little intellectual effort, and scarcely any judgment or taste in the direction of that little. But the music of the spheres would form but a sorry attraction in a music-hall programme, and Christopher Sly is not willing to accept nectar in exchange for a pot of even the smallest ale. And if the angry resentment of not a few readers gives the votary of style but little chance of an audience, it must be admitted that the lack of what I have called an aristocratic spirit gives the audience little chance of a performer. The conditions of modern life

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are unfavourable to the attainment of the peculiar mood of somewhat arrogant indifference which is the characteristic of the scholar. Every one knows Dean Gaisford's three reasons for the cultivation of the Greek language; and I for my part have no doubt that one of them most accurately describes an important feature of the *Wesen des Gelehrten.* It may not be necessary for him "to read the words of Christ in the original"; it may not be of absolute importance that he should "have situations of affluence opened to him." But it certainly is essential that he should "look down on his fellow-creatures from a proper elevation"; and this is what the tendency of modern social progress is making more and more difficult, at any rate in appearance. You cannot raise the level of the valleys without diminishing the relative height of the hills; and you cannot scatter education and elementary cultivation broadcast without diminishing the value of the privileges which appertain to superior culture. The old republic of letters was, like other old republics, a democracy only in name, but in reality a more or less close oligarchy, looking down on metics and slaves whose degradations and disabilities heightened its courage and gave a zest to its freedom. In letters, as in politics, we are doing our best to change all this; and the possible result may be, that every one will soon be able to write a newspaper

MODERN ENGLISH PROSE 1876.

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article, and that no one will aspire to anything beyond.[1]

MODERN ENGLISH PROSE 1876.

The general characteristics of style which the influence, combined or partial, of these forces has produced have been already indicated, but may perhaps now be summed up. Diffuseness; sacrifice of the graces of literary proportion to real or apparent clearness of statement; indulgence in cut-and-dried phrases; undue aiming at pictorial effect; gaudiness of unnatural ornament; preference of gross and glaring effects *en bloc* to careful composition. Certain authors who are either free from these defects, or have vigour enough to excuse or transform them, must now be noticed.

For reasons obvious, though various, it is not my intention to discuss in any way at the present time the style of the author of *Sartor Resartus*. Mr. Carlyle being thus removed, there can be little question who must take the foremost place in a discussion as to the merits and demerits of modern English prose style. And yet, it is at least doubtful whether in strictness we can assign

[1] I have for the present thought it better to leave out of consideration the probable effect of the diminished study of classics in modern school and university education. That this effect is decidedly adverse to the cultivation of style is sufficiently obvious, but the subject is too complicated to be incidentally treated, and perhaps the diminution itself is too recent for its effects to have been as yet much felt. [They have made themselves much more sensible in the sixteen years which have passed since this article was written.]

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to Mr. Ruskin a position in the very highest rank of writers if we are to adopt style as a criterion. The objection to his manner of writing is an obvious one, and one which he might very likely take as a compliment; it is too spontaneous in the first place, and too entirely subordinate to the subject in the second. I hope that it may be very clearly understood that I can see passages in his works which, for splendour of imaginative effect, for appropriateness of diction, for novelty and grandeur of conception, stand beyond all chance of successful rivalry, almost beyond all hope of decent parallel among the writings of ancient and modern masters. But in most cases this marvellous effect will, when carefully examined, be found to depend on something wholly or partially extrinsic to the style. Mr. Ruskin writes beautifully because he thinks beautifully, because his thoughts spring, like Pallas, ready armed, and the fashion of the armour costs him nothing. Everybody has heard of the unlucky critic whose comment on Scott's fertility was that "the invention was not to be counted, for that came to him of its own accord." So it is with Mr. Ruskin. His beauties of style "come to him of their own accord," and then he writes as the very gods might dream of writing. But in the moments when he is off the tripod, or is upon some casual and un-Delphic tripod of his own construction or selection, how is his style altered! The strange touches of unforeseen

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colour become splashed and gaudy, the sonorous roll of the prophetic sentence-paragraphs drags and wriggles like a wounded snake, the cunning interweaving of scriptural or poetic phrase is patched and seamy. A Balaam on the Lord's side, he cannot curse or bless but as it is revealed to him, whereas the possessor of a great style can use it at will. He can shine on the just and on the unjust; can clothe his argument for tyranny or for liberty, for virtue or for vice, with the same splendour of diction, and the same unperturbed perfection of manner; can convince us, carry us with him, or leave us unconvinced but admiring, with the same unquestioned supremacy and the same unruffled calm. Swift can write a *jeu d'esprit* and a libel on the human race, a political pamphlet and a personal lampoon, with the same felicity and the same vigour. Berkeley can present tar-water and the Trinity, the theory of vision and the follies of contemporary free-thinking, with the same perfect lucidity and the same colourless fairness. But with Mr. Ruskin all depends on the subject, and the manner in which the subject is to be treated. He cannot even blame as he can praise; and there must be many who are ready to accept everything he can say of Tintoret or of Turner, and who feel no call to object to any of his strictures on Canaletto or on Claude, who yet perceive painfully the difference of style in the panegyrist and the detractor, and who

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would demand the stricter if less obvious justice, and the more artistic if apparently perverted sensitiveness, of the thorough master of style.

MODERN ENGLISH PROSE 1876.

But if we have to quarrel with Mr. Ruskin because he has not sufficient command of the unquestioned beauties of his style, because he is not, in Carew's words—

> A king who rules as he thinks fit
> The universal monarchy of wit,

but is rather a slave to his own thoughts and fancies, a very opposite fault must be found with the next writer who falls to be mentioned. "We do not," it was once said of him, "we do not get angry so much with what Mr. Matthew Arnold says as with his insufferable manner of saying it." In other words, there is no fear of omitting to notice a deliberate command and peculiarity of manner in Mr. Arnold, whether that manner be considered "insufferable" or no. For myself I must confess, that I could very frequently find it in my heart to wish that Mr. Arnold had chosen any other style than that which appeared to afford him such extreme delight. Irony is an admirable thing, but it must be grave and not grimacing. Innocence is an admirable thing, but it should not be affected. To have a manner of one's own is an admirable thing, but to have a mannerism of one's own is perhaps not quite so admirable. It is curious that his unfortunately successful pursuit of this latter possession

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should have led Mr. Arnold to adopt a style which has more than any other the fault he justly censured many years ago as the special vice of modern art—the fault of the *fantastic*. No doubt the great masters of style have each a *cachet* which is easily decipherable by a competent student; no doubt, in spite of Lord Macaulay, Arbuthnot is to be distinguished from Swift, and the cunningest imitators of Voltaire from Voltaire himself. But to simulate this distinction by the deliberate adoption of mere tricks and manners is what no true master of style ever yet attempted, because for no true master of style was it ever yet necessary. Mr. Ruskin, to use the old Platonic simile, has not his horses sufficiently well in hand; at times the heavenly steed, with a strong and sudden flight, will lift the car amid the empyrean, at times the earth-born yoke-fellow will drag it down, with scarcely the assistance and scarcely the impediment of the charioteer. But even this is better than the driving of one who has broken his horses, indeed, but has broken them to little but mincing graces.

MODERN ENGLISH PROSE 1876.

It is not possible to speak with equal definiteness of the style of a third master of English prose, who ranks in point of age and of reputation with Mr. Ruskin and Mr. Arnold. It would certainly be an over-hasty or an ill-qualified critic who should assert that Mr. Froude's style is always faultless; but, on the other hand, it may

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be asserted, without any fear whatever of contradiction carrying weight, that at its best it is surpassed by no style of the present day, and by few of any other, and that at its worst its faults are—not of a venial character, for no fault in art is venial, but at any rate—of a kind which may meet with more ready excuse than those of the writers previously noticed. These faults are perhaps two only—undue diffuseness and undue aiming at the picturesque. We have seen that these are the two most glaring faults of the age, and by his indulgence in them, and the splendid effects which he has produced by that indulgence, Mr. Froude has undoubtedly earned his place, if not as a *Säcularischer Mensch*, at any rate as a representative man. No one, perhaps, who has read can fail to count among the triumphs of English prose the descriptions of the Pilgrimage of Grace in the *History*, of Sir Richard Grenvil's last fight in the *Short Studies*, of the wreckers at Ballyhige in the *English in Ireland*. There are also many shorter passages which exhibit almost every excellence that the most exacting critic could demand. But it is not to be denied that Mr. Froude has very frequently bowed the knee before the altar of Baal. It is unlawful to occupy twelve mighty volumes with the history of one nation during little more than half a century; it is unlawful for the sound critical reason of St. John, that if such a practice obtained universally,

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the world could not contain the books that should be written; and also for the reason that in such writing it is almost impossible to observe the reticence and compression which are among the lamps of style. It is unlawful to imagine and set down, except very sparingly, the colour of which the trees probably were at the time when kings and queens made their entrance into such and such a city, the buildings which they may or may not have looked upon, the thoughts which may or may not have occurred to them. Such sacrificings at the shrine of effect, such trespassings on the domains and conveying of the methods of other arts and alien muses, are not to be commended or condoned. But one must, at the same time, allow with the utmost thankfulness that there are whole paragraphs, if not whole pages, of Mr. Froude's, which, for practised skill of composition and for legitimate beauty of effect, may take their place among the proudest efforts of English art.

MODERN ENGLISH PROSE 1876.

It will probably be agreed that the three writers whom I have noticed stand at the head of contemporary English prose authors in point of age and authority; but there are other and younger authors who must necessarily be noticed in any account of the subject which aims at completeness. Mr. Swinburne's progress as a prose writer can hardly have failed to be a subject of interest, almost equally with his career as a poet,

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to every lover of our tongue. His earliest appearance, the Essay on Byron, is even now in many respects characteristic of his work; but it does not contain—and it is a matter of sincere congratulation for all lovers of English prose that it does not contain—any passage at all equal to the magnificent descant on Marlowe which closes its ten years younger brother, the Essay on Chapman. In the work between and since these two limits, the merits and defects of Mr. Swinburne as a prose writer may be read by whoso wills. At times it has seemed as if the weeds would grow up with the good seed and choke it. Mr. Swinburne has fallen into the error, not unnatural for a poet, of forgetting that the figures and the language allowable in poetry are not also allowable in prose. The dangerous luxury of alliteration has attracted him only too often, and the still more dangerous license of the figure called chiasmus has been to him even as a siren, from whose clutches he has been hardly saved. But the noticeable thing is that the excellences of his prose speech have grown ever stronger and its weaknesses weaker since he began. In the Essay on Blake, admirable as was much thereof, a wilful waste of language not unfrequently verging on a woful want of sense was too frequently apparent. In the Notes on his Poems, and in *Under the Microscope*, just as was most of the counter-criticism, it was impossible not to notice a tendency to verbiage and a proneness,

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I will not say to prefer sound to sense, but unnecessarily to reinforce sense with sound. But at the same time, in the *Essays and Studies*, and the Essay on Chapman, no competent critic could fail to notice, notwithstanding occasional outbreaks, the growing reticence and severity of form, as well as the increasing weight and dignity of meaning. Mr. Swinburne, as a prose writer, is in need of nothing but the pruning-hook. Most of his fellows are in want chiefly of something which might be worth pruning.

MODERN ENGLISH PROSE 1876.

It is obviously impossible in the present essay to notice minutely all even of the more prominent names in contemporary prose. Some there are among the older of our writers who yet retain the traditions of the theological school of writing, to which style owes so much. A good deal might be said of Cardinal Manning's earlier style (for his progress in this hierarchy hardly corresponded with his promotion in the other), as well as of Dr. Newman's admirable clearness and form, joined as it is, perhaps unavoidably, to a certain hardness of temper. Mr. Disraeli's peculiarities in style would almost demand an essay to themselves. They have never perhaps had altogether fair-play; for novel-writing and politics are scarcely friends to style. But Mr. Disraeli had the root of the matter in him, and never was guilty of the degradation of the sentence, which is the crying sin of modern prose; while his unequalled felicity in

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the selection of single epithets gave him a supply of legitimate ornament which few writers have ever had at command. Tastes, I suppose, will always differ as to the question whether his ornamentation was not sometimes illegitimate. The parrot-cry of upholstery is easily raised. But I think we have at last come to see that rococo work is good and beautiful in its way, and he must be an ungrateful critic who objects to the somewhat lavish emeralds and rubies of the *Arabian Nights*. Of younger writers, there are not many whose merits it would be proper to specify in this place; while the prevailing defects of current style have been already fully noticed. But there is one book of recent appearance which sets the possibilities of modern English prose in the most favourable light, and gives the liveliest hope as to what may await us if writers, duly heeding the temptations to which they are exposed, and duly availing themselves of the opportunities for study and imitation which are at their disposal, should set themselves seriously to work to develop *pro virili* the prose resources of the English tongue. Of the merely picturesque beauty of Mr. Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, there can be no necessity for me to say anything here. In the first place it cannot escape the notice of any one who reads the book, and in the second, if there be any truth in what has been already said, the present age by no means needs to be urged to cultivate

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or to appreciate this particular excellence. The important point for us is the purely formal or regular merit of this style, and this is to be viewed with other eyes and tested by other methods than those which are generally brought to bear by critics of the present day. The main point which I shall notice is the subordinate and yet independent beauty of the sentences when taken separately from the paragraph. This is a matter of the very greatest importance. In too much of our present prose the individual sentence is unceremoniously robbed of all proper form and comeliness. If it adds its straw to the heap, its duty is supposed to be done. Mr. Pater has not fallen in this error, nor has he followed the multitude to do evil in the means which he has adopted for the production of the singular "sweet attractive kind of grace" which distinguishes these *Studies*. A bungler would have depended, after the fashion of the day, upon strongly coloured epithets, upon complicated and quasi-poetic cadences of phrase, at least upon an obtrusively voluptuous softness of thought and a cumbrous protraction of sentence. Not so Mr. Pater. There is not to be discovered in his work the least sacrifice of the phrase to the word, of the clause to the phrase, of the sentence to the clause, of the paragraph to the sentence. Each holds its own proper place and dignity while contributing duly to the dignity and place of its superior in the hierarchy. Often the cadence of

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the sentence, considered separately, will seem to be—and will in truth be—quite different from that of the paragraph, because its separate completeness demands this difference. Yet the total effect, so far from being marred, is enhanced. There is no surer mark of the highest style than this separate and yet subordinate finish. In the words of Mr. Ruskin, it is "so modulated that every square inch is a perfect composition."

MODERN ENGLISH PROSE 1876.

It is this perfection of modulation to which we must look for the excellence that we require and do not meet with in most of the work of the present day, and it is exactly this modulation with which all the faults that I have had to comment upon in the preceding pages are inconsistent. To an artist who should set before him such a model as either of the passages which I have quoted, lapses into such faults would be impossible. He will not succumb to the easy diffuseness which may obliterate the just proportion and equilibrium of his periods. He will not avail himself of the ready assistance of stereotyped phraseology to spare himself the trouble of casting new moulds and devising new patterns. He will not imagine that he is a scene painter instead of a prose writer, a decorator instead of an architect, a caterer for the desires of the many instead of a priest to the worship of the few. He will not indulge in a style which requires the maximum of ornament in order to disguise and render palatable the minimum

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of art and of thought. He will not consider it his duty to provide, at the least possible cost of intellectual effort on the part of the reader, something which may delude him into the idea that he is exercising his judgment and his taste. And, above all, he will be careful that his sentences have an independent completeness and harmony, no matter what purpose they may be designed to fulfil. For the sentence is the unit of style; and by the cadence and music, as well as by the purport and bearing, of his sentences, the master of style must stand or fall. For years, almost for centuries, French prose has been held up as a model to English prose writers, and for the most part justly. Only of late has the example come to have something of the Helot about it. The influence of Victor Hugo — an influence almost omnipotent among the younger generation of French literary men—has been exercised in prose with a result almost as entirely bad as its effect in verse has been good. The rules of verse had stiffened and cramped French poetry unnaturally, and violent exercise was the very thing required to recover suppleness and strength; but French prose required no such surgery, and it has consequently lost its ordered beauty without acquiring compensatory charms. The proportions of the sentence have been wilfully disregarded, and the result is that French prose is probably now at a lower point

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of average merit than at any time for two centuries.

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That an art should be fully recognised as an art, with strict rules and requirements, is necessary to attainment of excellence in it; and in England this recognition, which poetry has long enjoyed, has hardly yet been granted to prose. No such verses as we find by scores in such books as Marston's Satires would now suggest themselves as possible or tolerable to any writer of Marston's powers; but in prose many a sentence quite as intolerable as any of these verses is constantly written by persons of presumably sound education and competent wits. The necessities of the prose writer are, an ear in the first place: this is indispensable and perhaps not too common. In the second place, due study of the best authors, as well to know what to avoid as what to imitate. Lastly, care, which perhaps is not too much to demand of any artist, so soon as he has recognised and has secured recognition of the fact that he is an artist. Care is indeed the one thrice-to-be-repeated and indispensable property of the prose writer. It is pre-eminently necessary to him for the very reason that it is so easy to dispense with it, and to write prose without knowing what one does. Verse, at least verse which is to stand, as Johnson says, "the test of the finger if not of the ear," cannot be written without conscious effort and observation. But something which may be

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mistaken for prose can unfortunately be produced without either taste, or knowledge, or care. With these three requisites there should be no limit to the beauty and to the variety of the results obtained. The fitness of English for prose composition will hardly be questioned, though it may be contended with justice that perhaps in no other language has the average merit of its prose been so far below the excellence of its most perfect specimens. But the resources which in the very beginning of the practice of original composition in fully organised English could produce the splendid and thoughtful, if quaint and cumbrous, embroideries of Euphues and the linked sweetness of the Arcadia, which could give utterance to the symphonies of Browne and Milton, which could furnish and suffice for the matchless simplicity of Bunyan, the splendid strength of Swift, the transparent clearness of Middleton and Berkeley, the stately architecture of Gibbon, are assuredly equal to the demands of any genius that may arise to employ them.

MODERN ENGLISH PROSE 1876.

It is therefore the plain duty of every critic to assist at least in impressing upon the mass of readers that they do not receive what they ought to receive from the mass of writers, and in suggesting a multiplication and tightening of the requirements which a prose writer must fulfil. There are some difficulties in the way of such impression and suggestion in the matter of style. It is not easy for the critic to escape being bidden, in the words,

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of Nicholas Breton, "not to talk too much of it, having so little of it," or to avoid the obvious jest of Diderot on Beccaria, that he had written an "ouvrage sur le style où il n'y a point de style." But I know no Utopia which ought to be more speedily rendered *topic*, than that in which at least the same censure which is now incurred by a halting verse, a discordant rhyme, or a clumsy stanza, should be accorded to a faultily-arranged clause, to a sentence of inharmonious cadence, to a paragraph of irregular and ungraceful architecture.[1]

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[1] [See for further remarks and cautions on this subject, Essays VII, X, and XII. 1892.]

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IV

ERNEST RENAN

EVERY one who has read Mérimée's *Lettres à Une Inconnue* must remember some not wholly complimentary passages respecting M. Renan. There is no need to quote the passages here; an allusion to them is enough in order to help us to formulate, by a process of contrast, the character of M. Renan as a critic and writer. Mérimée was himself, in a literary sense if not personally, the most exquisitely accomplished cynic that has ever existed. The way in which, throughout his not very bulky work, whole schools and regions of thought and art are represented by some little masterpiece, and then apparently dismissed as of no further interest to the author, is unique in literature. The way in which there appears in the beauty of all these representations something sinister, and as it were inhuman, is equally unique. Both in pure fantasy-pieces like the *Vénus d'Ille*, and in pictures of modern society like *La Double Méprise*, and in such astonishing reproductions of the harsher

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ERNEST RENAN.

sides of the past as *La Jacquerie*, the same literary perfection and the same cynical force are apparent. To every one who has, in however faint a measure, the tendency to look at life from the sarcastic side, Mérimée must always be the object of an immense admiration. But to such a writer himself nothing could be more unwelcome than anything even approaching what is irreverently called in English "gush,"—than the tendency not merely to think nobly and hopefully of life, and to dwell upon its more amiable aspects, but to dress it up in bright colours and agreeable forms, and to express these in somewhat effusive and voluble language, full of unction and of appeals to the heart, the sentiments, and the religious principle. I by no means give this as a description of M. Renan, but it is probably a sufficiently true description of Mérimée's M. Renan; and it was upon this subjective being, no doubt, that the author of *Colomba* vented his spleen. It ought to be remembered that the attacked person took his revenge in a most gentlemanlike correction. In the next volume of the *Origines* he alluded to Petronius as "Un Mérimée sceptique au ton froid et exquis, qui nous a laissé un roman d'une verve, d'une finesse accomplie en même temps que d'une corruption raffinée." The comparison is by no means ungenerous, and withal singularly true. Now it is hardly a paradox to say that in order to detect the character of any man or writer one

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cannot do better than take the reports of his enemies. By stripping these of malignity and exaggeration, by substituting the quality for the defect and the mean for the excess, such unfavourable accounts, unless they come from wholly untrustworthy or incompetent sources, may be made to yield a much larger amount of truth than the amiable but often vague and random language of panegyrists and partisans. Least of all was such a faculty as Mérimée's likely to go altogether astray, though it might very easily overpass the goal. The truth is that the literary and philosophical characteristics of M. Renan (for with matters theological we have nothing to do here) are very strongly marked, and for our time by no means common. In his attitude towards books and men he stands apart from any other school or individual of his own country and of the Continent, though perhaps it would not be difficult to name an English critic who, with many points of difference, had some points of agreement with him. To those who simply consider him in the light of an assailant or defender of certain theological or ecclesiastical ideas, these peculiarities are necessarily invisible. Let us see if by keeping theology apart they can be made to emerge into view.

It is always interesting and instructive to compare the earliest and the latest work of men of literary distinction. The earliest work of

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ERNEST RENAN.

M. Renan's known to me—putting aside mere college exercises—is the article on "L'État des Esprits en 1849"; the latest,[1] omitting *L'Église Chrétienne* as a simple continuation of a work planned and moulded twenty years ago, is *Caliban.* Between the enthusiasm of five-and-twenty and the quiet scepticism of fifty-five there is, of course, a good deal of difference; but the main features of the author's mind, and even to some extent of his literary style, are identical enough. There is the same disbelief in religious and political nostrums, the same preference for a somewhat vague elevation and expansion of heart, the same contempt of utilitarianism on the one side, and of the merely æsthetic attitude towards art and literature on the other. Between the youthful appeal in favour of "la pauvre humanité assise, morne et silencieuse, sur le bord du chemin," and the ingenious parody of Shakespeare which scandalised grave and precise democrats long afterwards, their author has something more than a fair amount of work done to show. I need take no account of works of pure erudition, though the treatise *De l'Origine du Langage* is not unimportant from the general point of view, because it shows, in a comparatively neutral field, the same reluctance to adopt materialist explanations and to admit the all-powerful action of circumstances as

[1] Latest in 1880, the original date of this essay. The subsequent work will be found summarised *infra.*

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distinguished from innate powers, which characterises M. Renan elsewhere. The catalogue of his more properly literary work may be limited to the monograph on Averroes, to the four or five volumes of Essays collected and reprinted under different titles, and to the six volumes of the *Origins of Christianity*. The book on Averroes, except for its connection with the author's Semitic studies, and perhaps also with the general history of free thought and revolt against religious dogma, does not seem to be particularly germane to his tastes. It is, however, an excellent book in its way, and the labour of its preparation must, beyond a doubt, have had an excellent disciplinary effect on M. Renan's style and manner. Inclined, as he most undoubtedly is, to be exuberant rather than the reverse, if he had given himself very early to easy literature, which requires much writing, little reading, and no research properly so called, the effect could hardly have failed to be unfavourable. Combining, as the book does, a bibliographic study of considerable complexity, an analysis of an extensive work, and a rapid survey of a long period of subsequent history, the amount of labour which it represents is very far out of proportion to its bulk. There are passages here and there, moreover, which distinctly enough foreshadow the manner and method of the author of the *Vie de Jésus*, such as the section on the curious myth of the *Tres Impostores*, and that describing Petrarch's

ERNEST RENAN.

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tribulations with the Venetian Averroists. The scattered essays are naturally much more fertile of light on the character of their author than a work where the plan and almost the contents were traced out for him by his subject. His various studies in religious history may be taken partly as sketches for the finished work which was to come, but still more as protreptic discourses put forward to dispose the public to receive that work with understanding and favour, or else critical appreciations of different forms of the religious spirit. The least happy of these is probably that on Channing, in which the author, true to a bad habit of his countrymen, seems to start with a preconceived archetypal Englishman or American (for it is much the same to him) and to reason downwards. More interesting still are the papers united under the heading *Questions Contemporaines*, which for the most part exhibit in various forms that ardent desire for an improvement in the higher education of his country, which is one of M. Renan's most honourable characteristics, and which, before his old age, he had already lived to see in several ways fulfilled. Nor can the political sketches entitled *Réforme Intellectuelle et Morale* be omitted if a full estimate is to be formed of their author. The famous correspondence with the author of the *Leben Jesu*, while perhaps it exposes only too clearly the sorrowful chances that await the too faithful believer in sweet

ERNEST RENAN.

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reasonableness now as in other days, is at least as valuable as a moral tell-tale as it is honourable to the writer. Two long studies, one having the general title of the book, the other headed *De la Monarchie Constitutionnelle en France*, exhibit not only such practical political ideas as the author has formed, but also a very favourite notion of his, that great moral and intellectual achievements unfit a nation for playing a prominent political part, and that in this order of thought, as in another, it must lose its life to save it. Finally, M. Renan's more purely personal and literary studies show less an ability on his part to put himself in the place of the subjects criticised, than an ability to improve them in the ecclesiastical sense, that is to say, to use their history and peculiarities for the purpose of illustrating his own ethical, religious, and political ideas. Interesting, however, as are these lesser pieces to the student, and to all who care for idiosyncrasy of work as opposed to mere volume and importance of subject, they can hardly be regarded even now, and will almost certainly not be regarded hereafter, as anything more than a vestibule and precinct to the book which has occupied the prime of the author's life, and upon which, beyond all doubt, he would himself prefer to base his chances of fame.

ERNEST RENAN.

It may be questioned whether any writer ever manifested a more distinct and uniform personality of thought and style than that which M. Renan

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ERNEST RENAN.

maintained through the six volumes of his greatest work, the publication of which extended over twenty years. The first impression that the *Vie de Jésus* and its successors produce on critical readers, whether they be orthodox or unorthodox, is in all probability identical, nor can it be said that this impression is ever wholly removed. Nothing can, to all appearance, be more hopelessly uncritical and arbitrary than the proceeding. To take a connected narrative and reject such details as happen not to square with preconceived ideas, while admitting the others; to reject a prophecy as obviously false, and take it up next minute as a trustworthy history of the events *a posteriori*; to see in a reported miracle, not an imposture, but an innocent distortion of some ordinary fact—all this seems at first sight to partake decidedly more of the spirit of *Dichtung* than of *Wahrheit*. The historian has also, in common with many other historians of the latter half of the nineteenth century, a most remarkable habit of building up whole characters and histories out of slight personal traits. St. James the Less, if he had foreseen that the callosities on his knees and the gold plate on his forehead would bring him into such trouble, would infallibly have discarded the latter and adopted a cushion to obviate the former. The unfortunate Claudius Lysias may fairly complain of the accusation of "stupidity," founded upon one or two casual allusions which certainly do not bear

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that sense to all readers; while, on the other hand, Barnabas has to thank M. Renan for favours received in return for a very slight historical consideration. But before long the rough places become tolerably smooth to an intelligent walker. The object of the book, as a defence of principles and modes of character which seem to the writer of the first importance to the world, soon makes itself apparent. M. Renan's two wings, as the mediæval allegorists would say, are the abstractions which are called, in the technical terms of theology and morals, spirituality and unction. In his use of both of these there are points which are decidedly less akin to the English temperament, and to such half-English temperaments as Mérimée's, than to the softer and more feminine temper which is so largely represented in the average Frenchman. The words of the hymn, "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild," express the attraction which the critic has found on the moral side in the founder of the Christian religion; the words "the kingdom of God" represent his attraction on the purely intellectual side. He has inherited from that religion, or has made up for himself (whichever phrase may be preferred), an ideal of unworldliness as distinguished from the self-seeking and materialism of modern life, of mild and impartial affection as opposed to the stormy passions or cold indifference of the individual.

With this *a priori* conception he has started,

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and it is this that shapes his handling of his work.

ERNEST RENAN.

In the earliest volume the sentimental side of the matter has most play, and it is still most remarkable therein. Without being very cynical, it is permissible to feel the abundance of such adjectives as "délicieux," "charmant," "ravissant," "enivrant," "exquis," as rather cloying. With *Les Apôtres* things improve from this point of view. The sentimental side of the matter is perforce kept in the background, and the "kingdom of God," the battle of spiritualism against materialism of all sorts, comes more to the front. It is in these later volumes, moreover, that the remarkable art of the writer becomes chiefly manifest. To weave a series of fragmentary notices, many of which his critical (or uncritical) method compels him to reject, into a connected narrative, to keep up the contrasted importance of the different parts, and in doing this to keep the double end, the inculcation of spirituality and of moral beauty, in view, without wearying the reader, is a task of sufficient difficulty in itself. But when it is remembered that to the immense majority of readers the story is already familiar, that they have from earliest youth been taught to expect and welcome it in one form only, and that they are (supposing other prepossessions absent) as much disposed as children are to resent alteration and addition in a favourite tale, the difficulty becomes immensely complicated. Lastly, when we add to all this

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that the narrative has perforce to take the shape of something like a perpetual commentary, usually the most arid of literary forms, the hardness of the task is raised to very nearly the highest point, and it is clear that only literary faculty of a very remarkable kind could enable the author to discharge it.

ERNEST RENAN.

The treatment of the subject is of course to a great extent conditioned by its nature, yet it is at the same time shaped by the idiosyncrasy of the practitioner. Of the fortunes of the Christian Church, from the date of the Crucifixion to the beginning of the third century, neither document nor tradition, orthodox or unorthodox, gives any connected survey. On the other hand, an immense body of literature of all kinds, sacred and profane, Jewish, Christian, and Pagan, religious, historical, and philosophical, survives containing the materials, the *pièces* of such a history. A critic of the sober school, whether belonging to the merely dryasdust order or to the product-of-the-circumstances sect, would assuredly find too many gaps to be filled, more or less conjecturally, to please him. Biographers and historians of this class like a subject upon which the full light of day has been thrown, where there is abundant material, and where the task is little more than one of skilful combination and intelligent interpreting. On the other hand, the merely superficial theoriser would find himself hampered by the multitude of scrappy details, jutting up like the tops of submarine rocks, useless

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and almost impossible for purposes of landing and agriculture, but sufficient to render careless navigation exceedingly dangerous. Many an ingenious theory has been upset before now by a troublesome and sterile fact of this kind. But M. Renan happens to combine in remarkably full measure the talent for conjecture and the talent for patient research. The way in which he has followed up in courageous dives the submarine world which connects, or might very conceivably connect, the emerging points of fact or tradition, is a triumph of the combined method. The book, like most other histories where the imagination is strongly represented, and perhaps with greater justice than in any other case, has been called a romance. It would be fairer to call it a conjectural restoration of history. All conjectural restorations incline to the romantic.

ERNEST RENAN.

A detail worthy of notice in estimating M. Renan's choice and use of his materials, is his extreme predilection for the apocryphal sacred books, both Jewish and Christian, and especially for the apocryphal apocalypses. Since the alteration of the lectionary and the disuse of the custom of binding up the apocrypha with the Old and New Testaments, it is probable that such of these singular documents as used to be recognised by the Church of England are unknown even to some persons professedly observant of religious matters in this country. Some of them again, such as the Book of Enoch and the *Shepherd* of Hermas

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(which, by the way, is not strictly an apocryphal book), have never among us had even this chance of recognition. As far as literary merits go there can be no doubt that this obsolescence is a great pity. There are not many more delightful books of their class than the Wisdom of Solomon, than Ecclesiasticus, and than the Fourth Book of Esdras. To all these "oubliés et dédaignés" M. Renan has given his particular attention, and his analyses of many of them, notably of the *Shepherd* and the Fourth Book of Esdras, are not merely among the most attractive passages of his book, but are also excellent examples of literary abstracts. There are indeed many points about these books which appeal to such a critic. They are perhaps more saturated than the canonical books with the Semitic spirit, in that excited and recalcitrant form which it assumed in the days immediately preceding and immediately following the Christian era; they are full of vague but poetical imagery; they lend themselves in the most obliging way to the conjectural interpretations in reference to historical events of which M. Renan is so fond. Moreover they are in many cases romantic pictures of more or less private life which supply abundance of local colour as well as of information as to modes of thought. Thus they are the most fertile of quarries to a patient worker in mosaic, the most precious of colour-stores to such a painter as M. Renan, who has

ERNEST RENAN.

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ERNEST RENAN.

set himself to depict on a vast scale the whole spiritual and emotional life and movement of a time such as the first two centuries. Of the strictly narrative portions of the work produced on these principles and from these sources, it would be impossible here to give examples, nor is it necessary; but a few short extracts may perhaps help to illustrate the character of M. Renan's style and also of his thought. The first shall be taken from the eloquent opening of *Les Apôtres*, in which the author sets forth the subjective view of the Resurrection:

But love and enthusiasm know no such thing as situations without an issue. They laugh at the impossible, and rather than abandon hope, will do violence to reality. Many well-remembered words of the Master, especially those in which he had foretold his future advent, could be interpreted in the sense of a resurrection from the tomb. Such a belief was, besides, so natural that the mere faith of the disciples might have sufficed for its production. The great prophets Enoch and Elijah had not tasted death. The belief was even beginning to obtain that the patriarchs and the chief men of the elder dispensation were not really dead, and that their bodies lay in their sepulchres at Hebron still inhabited by life and by the soul. It was certain to happen in the case of Jesus, as it has happened in the case of all men who have arrested the attention of their fellows. The world, accustomed to attribute to them superhuman virtues, cannot admit that they have undergone the unjust and revolting law of death. At the moment when Mahomet expired, Omar quitted the tent, sword in hand, and threatened to strike the head off any one who dared to affirm that the prophet had ceased to live. Death is so unreasonable a thing when it falls on men of great heart or great

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genius, that the people refuse to believe such an error of nature possible. Heroes do not die. For is not that the true existence which is prolonged in the memory of those who love us? The adored Master had for years filled the little world of his companions with joy and hope. Could they consent to leave him to moulder in the tomb? No! He had lived too long and too intimately in the hearts of his followers for it not to be affirmed after his death that he was still alive for ever.

ERNEST RENAN.

Here is a passage dealing less with psychology, and more with social theories:

The glory of the Jewish nation is to have proclaimed this principle [of social fraternity], whence arose the downfall of the elder states, and which is itself not destined to perish. The Jewish Law is social, not political; the prophets, the apocalyptic writers, advocate revolutions of a social, not of a political character. In the first half of the first century the Jews, brought face to face with profane civilisation, are animated with but one idea—to refuse the advantages of the Roman Law, a law atheistic, philosophic, productive merely of general equality, and to proclaim the excellence of their own theocratic law, which gives a religious and moral complexion to society. All Jewish thinkers, such as Philo and Josephus, hold that the Law is the secret of happiness. The laws of other peoples will have justice done; it is no matter to them whether the people be good or happy. The Jewish Law, on the contrary, descends into the minutest particulars of moral education. Christianity is a development of the same idea. . . . Every Church is a community where each has his claims on all, where there must be no one indigent, no one wicked, and where, in consequence, there is a mutual right of supervision and command. Primitive Christianity might be called a great association of the poor, a heroic effort against egotism based on the principle that the claims of the individual go no farther than to the absolutely necessary,

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and that superfluities belong to those who need. Between such a spirit and the spirit of Roman polity a war to the death is inevitable, while on the other hand Christianity can only succeed in ruling the world by modifying seriously its natural tendencies and its original programme.

ERNEST RENAN.

Yet the needs which Christianity represents will abide eternally. Community of living, by the second half of the Middle Ages, having been abused by an intolerant Church, the monastery having become too often a feudal institution or a barrack of dangerous and fanatical soldiery, the modern spirit has shown itself unfavourable to it. We have forgotten that it is in the common life that the human soul has tasted most joy. The psalm, "How good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity," has ceased to be our song. But when modern individualism has brought forth its final fruits, when humanity, dwarfed and saddened and become impotent, shall return to great institutions and manly discipline, when our mean society of citizens, our world of pygmies, shall have been beaten off by the heroic and idealist elements of humanity, then the common life will regain its value. Science and a crowd of other great things will be organised monastically with a continuity independent of mere fleshly inheritance. The importance attributed by our time to the family will diminish, and egotism, the essential principle of large societies, will no longer suffice great souls. A league of otherwise opposed forces will be formed against vulgarity. The words of Jesus, and the ideas of the Middle Ages on the subject of poverty, will once more appear reasonable. We shall understand how the mere possession of private property was once held to be an inferiority, and how the founders of mysticism argued for centuries whether Jesus had possessed "things which perish in the using." The crotchets of the Franciscans will become serious social problems, and the splendid ideal traced by the author of the Acts will be written as a prophetic revelation on the gates of the paradise of humanity.

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After this eloquent prophecy of some of the things (more satisfactory at any rate than the restoration of Picrochole) which will happen *à la venue des coquecigrues*, let us take a picture of a more historical character:

ERNEST RENAN.

What characterised the religion of Greece in old days, what characterises it still, is its lack of the infinite and the vague; the tenderness and the feminine softness, the deep religious sentiment of the German and Celtic races, is wanting in the true Hellenes. The piety of the orthodox Greek consists in ritual and in outward observances. His churches, often of sufficient elegance, have none of the element of the terrible which distinguishes a Gothic minster. In this Eastern Christianity there are no tears, no prayers, no inward compunction. Even burials have a certain gaiety about them; they are celebrated in the evening, at set of sun, when the shadows are long, with soft music and the display of bright colours. The fanatical gravity of the Latins displeases these lively, light-minded, untroubled races. The sick man himself is not depressed; death approaches him cheerily, and things around him smile. This is the secret of the divine gaiety of Homer and Plato; even the tale of Socrates' death in the *Phædo* has hardly a touch of sadness. To blossom, to bear fruit, that is life, and why ask for more? It is a superficial people, taking life as a thing with nothing supernatural in it, with no background. Such a simplicity of attitude depends to a great extent upon the climate, the purity of the air, the exhilaration which the mere breathing of it gives. But it depends also on the splendidly idealist instincts of the Hellenic race. A mere nothing suffices in Greece to produce the contentment which the sight of beauty causes. A tree, a flower, a lizard, a tortoise, awaking the remembrance of the thousand metamorphoses sung by the poets:—a tiny rivulet; a cranny in the rock dignified as a cave of the nymphs; a well with a cup on the brink; a strait like that at Poros, so narrow that the butterflies flit across it, yet navigable by

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ERNEST RENAN.

mighty ships; orange and cypress groves that throw their shadow over the sea; a clump of pines on the rocks:—any of these is enough. To walk at night in the gardens, to listen to the cicale, to sit in the moonlight and play the flute, to drink of the mountain spring, bringing with one bread and fish and a flask of wine, with a song to accompany the repast; to crown the head with flowers and the door lintels with leaves, at the family festivals; on public feast days to carry the thyrsus decked with foliage, to dance all day long, to play with tame kids—such are the pleasures of the Greek, pleasures of a poor and thrifty race, always young, inhabiting a delightful country, finding its joys in itself and in the goods the gods provide. The Theocritean idyl was in all Hellenic countries a simple fact; Greece always delighted in this elegant and amiable style of minor poetry, exact to life in her own case, in the case of all other countries stupid and unreal. Good-humour and joy in living are the special peculiarities of the Greek. He does not construe *indulgere genio* after the fashion of the Englishman's heavy intoxication, of the Frenchman's coarse disport; it is with him a simple result of reflection that Nature is good, and that it is right to follow her. To the Greek, indeed, Nature is a mistress of good taste, an instructress in virtue and rectitude: the notion of concupiscence, of a temptation by nature to do ill, is to him a contradiction. The fancy for dress which distinguishes the Palikari, and which shows itself so innocently in young Greek girls, is not the pompous vanity of the barbarian, the silly forwardness of the citizen's wife, puffed up with a low-born pride, it is the simple sentiment of unaffected youth feeling itself the heir of the inventors of beauty.

One more short piece of a somewhat sterner character may serve to complete this miniature anthology and to show how M. Renan can, without effort or grandiloquence, convey the idea of the mysterious and the terrible:—

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Since the Jewish nation, in a kind of despair, had taken to reflecting upon its destiny, the imagination of the people had directed itself with affectionate concentration to the ancient prophets. Now of all the personages of the past whose memory came like a dream in the night to agitate and excite the nation, the greatest was Elijah. This giant among the prophets in his savage solitude on Carmel, sharing the life of wild beasts, dwelling in the hollows of the rocks, whence from time to time he descended like a thunderbolt to make and unmake kings, had become, by a series of successive metamorphoses, a kind of supernatural being, sometimes visible, sometimes invisible, who had never tasted death. It was a general belief that Elijah would return and restore Israel. The austere life he had led, the terrible memories which he had left, and which still abide in the imagination of the East,[1] his threatening image, which even now seems to spread terror and death, his whole legend, full of vengeance and fear, produced a lively impression on the mind, and stamped, as it were, a birthmark on the results of popular throes. Whosoever aspired to active eminence among the people was bound to imitate Elijah; and, as the solitary life had been the distinguishing peculiarity of this prophet, it became customary to look on the "man of God" as a hermit. It was imagined that all holy personages had had their period of penance, of austerity, of life in regions far from towns, and a retirement to the desert became thus the condition and prelude of lofty destinies.

ERNEST RENAN.

I have given the note as well as the text here because it illustrates well the manner in which M. Renan builds his most literary passages on

[1] [Abdallah, the ferocious Pasha of Acre, nearly died of fright after beholding the Prophet in a dream standing erect on the Mount. In the pictures of the Christian churches the portrait of Elijah is surrounded with severed heads, and the Mussulmans themselves fear him. *M. Renan's Note.*]

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fragments of fact. A less accomplished artist would probably have dragged the pasha and the heads into the text, for the sake of emphasis and colour.

ERNEST RENAN.

In this work M. Renan must be regarded as one of the class of picturesque historians, a class of writers from whom the world has suffered many things in these last days. But he is a picturesque historian with a great many differences, and almost every one of these differences is in his favour. Eclectic and, to a great extent, imaginative as his method is, he can rarely be accused of actual exaggeration, or of affecting the picturesque for the picturesque's sake. He is not in the habit of basing rhetorical generalisations upon nothing at all, merely to add to the forcible character of his picture. There is a sobriety about him which the weary reader, tired of fireworks, in vain demands from certain historians of the same general character in England. Moreover, his picturesqueness, such as it is, is in the strictest keeping with the general plan and purport of his book, and results logically from the principles which he has set before him. "Que je voudrais," he says somewhere of the author of the *Imitatio Christi*, "être peintre, pour le montrer tel que je le conçois, doux et recueilli, assis en son fauteuil de chêne, dans le beau costume des bénédictins de Mont Cassin." The assumption as to the authorship of the famous book may be matter of argument, but the sentence is the key to all the author's own

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picturesque passages; they are resorted to simply to show us the person or the scene, such as the historian conceives it, and are thus illuminations, not squibs and crackers let off for the purpose of dazzling and crackling. Sometimes, of course, the subjectivity of view is rather excessive; it is certainly a hard saying when one finds M. Renan pronouncing Ecclesiastes "le seul livre aimable" that the Jewish spirit has ever produced. The Preacher is delightful reading no doubt, but amiable is about the last epithet that one would feel inclined to give him. However, everybody must see with his own eyes, and the most that outsiders can do is to lend spectacles to the short-sighted. M. Renan, if in this particular instance his glasses hardly suit our sight, is usually one of the most serviceable of opticians. With the principles that human nature, due difference being made for varieties of race, is everywhere and at all times pretty much the same—that outward circumstances may modify, but cannot wholly determine its action—that happiness, moral good, and intellectual cultivation are the objects of life, he has made edification and delight equally the objects of his book. He has, indeed, stated his main theory with sufficient clearness in the preface to his *Essais de Morale et de Critique*. "Morality is the one thing eminently serious and true, and by itself it suffices to give meaning and direction to life. Impenetrable veils hide from us the secret

ERNEST RENAN.

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ERNEST RENAN.

of this world, whose reality is at once irresistible and oppressive. Philosophy and science will for ever pursue without ever attaining the formula of this Proteus, unlimited by reason, inexpressible in language. But there is one foundation which no doubt can shake, and in which man will ever find a firm ground amidst his uncertainties; good is good and evil is evil. No system is necessary to enable us to hate the one and love the other; and it is in this sense that faith and love, possessing no seeming connection with the intellect, are the true base of moral certainty, and the only means possessed by man of understanding in some slight measure the problem of his origin and destiny."

Some notable failings and dislikes of M. Renan's give us important side-lights on his literary and critical character. One such is his attitude towards the Middle Ages. He has written and read about them more than most people, and it requires some courage to bring a charge of short-coming against the author of *Averroès*, and of the excellent discourse on the Art of the Fourteenth Century in France. Yet it is soon tolerably clear to an attentive reader, and perfectly clear to one who has some knowledge of mediæval literature, that M. Renan is out of sympathy with the Ages of Faith. He is even so far out of sympathy with them that he fails altogether to understand them in some important points, which have nothing whatever to do with theology or Church history.

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ERNEST RENAN.

We rub our eyes when we come to the statement (in the preface of *Averroès et l'Averroïsme*), that the Middle Ages, "intellectually speaking, represent nothing but gropings after a return to antiquity." It would be safer to affirm the exact contrary. In hardly a single great instance of the intellectual development of the Middle Ages is there any real affinity with the spirit of classicism. With characteristic and uncritical docility they sometimes borrowed classical forms, dressed themselves up in scraps of classical ore, proposed classical masters as objects of admiration and reverence. But in reality the two are poles asunder. The author of *Roland* is separated from the author of the *Iliad*, the author of *Lancelot du Lac* from the author of the *Odyssey*, Audefroy le Bastard from Horace, Anselm from Aristotle, Villeharcouin from Thucydides, by a gulf which no possible 'gropings" could traverse. Accordingly, whenever M. Renan deals with the Middle Ages, and especially with Scholasticism, he is unsatisfactory, because he is unsympathetic. Nor is the reason of this by any means far to seek; it is not the religious side of the Middle Ages that repels him, but their moral and æsthetic side. He seems to miss in them the sunny aspect which attracts him alike in things Eastern and in things Greek. The strong shadows that give the character and, to some persons, the attraction of Gothic architecture, make him shiver. If there is any part of Europe during those

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times on which he looks with satisfaction it is Spain, Provence, and perhaps Italy—all lands that love to lie in the sun—not his own Brittany and northern France, and England and Germany, with their gloom and their combativeness, and the absence of rose-pink and sky-blue in their pictures. In particular M. Renan has evidently a strong dislike to fighting. For such a master of description his sketch of the Siege of Jerusalem is comparatively tame, and he passes over the Battle of Bedriacum—which still awaits its picturesque historian, though surely no battle of the nations ever better deserved one—with a hasty shudder at its butchery. It may be suspected that M. Renan, patriotic as he is, by no means shares the modern admiration for "l'Épopée Française," and that the *Chansons de Gestes*, with the ceaseless ring of their assonances, clashing like lance on shield and sword on helmet, seem to him distinctly barbarous. He is more at home in the Arthurian legends, for which any native of Brittany must feel a certain reverence. But on the whole the presence of the warlike spirit, against which he again and again testifies, is too strong in the Middle Ages for M. Renan. He says somewhere, "J'aime le moyen âge," but I venture to doubt whether his affection is spontaneous and genuine.

Another interesting point in the critic's mental disposition is his attitude towards philosophy of the more abstract kind. Here again, wherever he

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has to touch on such matters, an absence of sympathy is apparent—strikingly, for instance, in the account of the Gnostic sects in the last volume of the *Origines*. ERNEST RENAN.

To any one who has a weakness for speculation, there is something especially fascinating in the fragmentary notices of Basilides and Valentinus, which have come down to us in the sorriest possible condition in which any such notices could possibly come, involved, that is to say, in the partisan refutations of their adversaries. To these unfortunates M. Renan devotes indeed some admirable pages, but they do not inspire him with half the interest that is excited by, let us say, the *Shepherd* of Hermas, that curious mixture of the devout gallantry of the seventeenth century with the apocalyptic fancies of the second. Not many men have been more in contact with Scholastic literature than M. Renan, but here again the fantastic attraction which that literature has for some people seems to exercise no influence over him. He evidently does not feel the magnetism of unbridled logic which sometimes tempts the reader in moments of weakness to devote the rest of his life to *Quæstiones Quodlibetales*, and such like ware. His allusions, not merely in his book on Averroes but elsewhere, to Scholasticism, are possibly just, but certainly harsh. Its absence of form and colour and human interest seems to repel him. This being so, it is not surprising that he should speak of the later philosophy of Germany

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with respect indeed, but hardly with affection, and still less with enthusiasm. Hegel certainly cannot have much attraction for one who is proof against Basilides and Erigena and Occam. Even in his handling of Spinosa the dialectic element is kept out of sight in a very singular manner. Some of the contents of the *Dialogues et Fragments Philosophiques* may seem to contradict this view. But the greater part of that curious book appears to me to represent no permanent or deep-rooted convictions of its author. Events had for a moment upset M. Renan's equanimity, and he retired upon philosophy. Moreover, in the study which concludes it (La Métaphysique et son Avenir), his more habitual attitude towards such questions reappears distinctly enough. Indeed it is in this respect that the practical aspect of M. Renan's mind is most evident. He has his Utopias, no doubt; indeed he is very largely estated in those shadowy regions. But they are on the whole very practical Utopias, and the inhabitants are more occupied with conduct than with speculation, with their duties towards their neighbours than with the contemplation of their own interiors. In the *Royaume de Dieu* of which he is so fond, it does not appear that Barbara and Celarent will occupy a very high place among the thrones and dominations recognised by the constitution.

ERNEST RENAN.

Yet one more of these inquiries into the dislikes of the subject. I do not know that

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anywhere in a dozen pages a writer has thrown more light upon his own individuality than M. Renan has thrown in the little piece entitled "La Théologie de Béranger," which may be found reprinted at the end of the *Questions Contemporaines*. It is, perhaps, the only occasion on which he becomes literally violent and intolerant. In the pieces which concern his own grievances, in those which regard the not very handsome treatment he received during the unlucky Strauss correspondence, there is nothing half so sharp as in this review of "Le Béranger des Familles." For persons mischievously disposed there is something extremely comic in the spectacle of one of the most benevolent and amiable writers of the last part of the century completely losing his temper and his charity with one of the most benevolent and amiable writers of the first part. As happens, moreover, in nineteen cases out of twenty, when the critic ceases to be impassive he loses his critical faculty. I certainly do not agree with those who, knowing French literature only partially, hold exaggerated notions of Béranger's excellence. But there is something more in the author of songs which range from "Le Grenier" to "Les Fous" than the mere vulgarity which is all or nearly all that M. Renan can see in him. In his repetition of the old preference of the insipid pastorals and jargon-ditties of Desaugiers to the work of Béranger, I cannot but think that M. Renan makes

ERNEST RENAN.

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ERNEST RENAN.

a capital error. But this very error is respectable enough in its way, and certainly characteristic. Béranger's Chauvinism, his affectation of the unpleasant but purely conventional style which is called in French *grivois*, his adoption of the stock French habit—as old as the Fabliaux—of delighting in the degradation of feminine character, are all things that M. Renan cannot away with. Doubtless, too, they are all very bad things. If the present object were the rehabilitation of Béranger—a task which is superfluous, and for which I have no particular inclination—a good deal would have to be said on the other side. But at present the subject is not Béranger, but his critic, and that critic's idiosyncrasy. It is easy to see in this protest the outcry of offended spiritualism and delicacy indignant at seeing its gods hobnobbed with, its ideals of the eternal-feminine exchanged for the less amiable if more easily found types of the baggage-waggon and the pavements, and its notions of duty, liberty, peace, and justice passed by, in order that homage may be paid to the Napoleonic legend, and that militarism may be held up as the first instinct of man. These three crimes are of all things most distasteful to M. Renan, and unluckily they are among the things most prominent in Béranger's works, at least in the more popular portion of them. Once more our author has told us what he is, by telling us the persons with whom he does not live.

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ERNEST RENAN.

If this account of the principles of M. Renan's literary and critical character be correct, it is evident that it stands in striking contrast to two other schools which have between them divided most of the critical talent of France during the last half century. In the first place it is far removed—to the extent, indeed, of complete antipathy—from the purely indifferent criticism of form rather than matter in life and literature which has been so strongly represented during that time. Of such criticism there have of course been many varieties, differing with the idiosyncrasy of the critics. The sarcastic and, in a way, severe attitude of Mérimée is not the good-natured and purely apolaustic attitude of Gautier. But in all this school there may be said to be sometimes an impatience, sometimes a dislike, sometimes a simple neglect or omission, of the moral view of questions of literature or conduct. On the other hand M. Renan's process stands in equally sharp contrast to the still more popular method of Sainte-Beuve, one side of which has been developed to an extent which may fairly be called exaggerated by M. Taine. This latter method, as thus exaggerated, consists, it need hardly be said, in treating the man and his work as for the most part an effect and not a cause. Its practitioners, in order to explain their patient, set to work to examine his *milieu* in every possible way, and, at any rate professedly, are content to accept the results of

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their examination as an explanation. The spirit of the age, the character of the surroundings, the influences of grandfathers and grandmothers, the style of education, living, and so forth, are taken as the data out of which the result is to be got. It would not be true, of course, to say that moral considerations exercise no influence over this class of critic, or that he has no likes or dislikes. But his likes and his dislikes are not ostensibly governed by any *a priori* principles, and concern the individual criticised less than the influences which are supposed to have produced him.

ERNEST RENAN.

With M. Renan the case is quite different. He has so much of Cousin in him (of Cousin, of whom he never fails to speak with a somewhat exaggerated respect) that the big words Vrai, Beau, and Bien, or, if it be preferred, the great things which these big words signify, are always present before him. As a man or a book happens to fall in or to fall out with these notions of his, so the man or the book is judged. Nor is he apt to attribute much force to the product-of-the-century theory. An accurate student of history is never likely to ignore the general tendency of periods. But in the formation of that general tendency M. Renan is willing to allow a great deal more force to the influence, and especially to the moral influence, of individuals than most other critics of the day. It is thus that in his principal work he is continually striving to hold up the

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personality of the actors clearly to view, even when there is the very smallest evidence of that personality to go upon. In judging personalities, too, he never lets himself be carried away by any fascinations of the paradoxical ultra-literary sort. He has perfectly well exposed the oddities of Nero's character, but those oddities have not inclined him to be lenient to the implacable, beautiful tyrant. If he is disposed to let Nero off at all gently, it is not because of his grandiose fancies, his unquiet searching after some new and infinite form of evil, but because Poppæa and Acte were to all appearance really attached to him. In this point even Nero falls among the things that seem to M. Renan lovely and of good report.

Indeed the last words fairly enough describe the character of his general predilections. The affections of all kinds—though M. Renan has an odd craze that family affection is an "égoïsme à plusieurs" very liable to abuse—are the coefficients of human character with which he likes best to deal. In matter of natural beauty he inclines in the same way to the idyllic and pastoral. Even in such points as his views on education and science, the same solicitude for the presence of a human interest of the softer sort manifests itself. He is exceedingly anxious that France should devote herself more than has hitherto been the case to "hautes études." But the *hautes études* which attract him are not mathematics

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ERNEST RENAN.

or abstract philosophy, but comparative philology, critical history, the study of religion, all of them more or less intimately connected with the hopes and fears, the daily life and daily wants of the endless generations behind us. Whatsoever is abstract, bloodless, and dry, repels him. Despite the *Lettre à M. Berthelot* and some other things, I should doubt whether he has much genuine affection for what is commonly called natural science. The touch of materialism and of inhumanity which often accompanies the pursuit of such science, must necessarily revolt him.

Thus such force as M. Renan can exert is a force in the direction of spiritualism, morality of a certain kind, peaceable flows of soul. It may sometimes be difficult to square his apparent views and desires with any accurate estimate of the history of the past, or the probabilities of the future. The pleasant cloudy Utopias which he describes, in which great Pan seems to be alive again, and everybody contributes to the foundation and confirmation of the kingdom of God by inoffensive conduct, freedom from uncomfortable striving and πλεονεξία, and the cultivation of comparative philology and the domestic affections, seem occasionally to be situated in a land that is very far off. It has indeed been observed by the wisdom of the elders that the rainbow rarely touches the ground quite close to the spectator's feet, and that St. Brandan's Isle, and other regions

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of the blest, have a knack of fleeing before the seeker.

ERNEST RENAN.

Nevertheless it is impossible to assign any but a beneficial tendency to an influence of this kind at such a time as the present. M. Renan represents in French literature the tradition which his countryman Châteaubriand founded, or borrowed from Rousseau, nearly a century ago, and which was continued to our own days by George Sand—the tendency, that is to say, to rely upon and appeal to the emotions rather than the intellect, to dress up amiable thoughts in gorgeous or elegant language, to philosophise, if possible, ἄνευ μαλακίας, and to cultivate the beautiful with such regard to εὐτέλεια as may be. His literary taste is much better than Châteaubriand's, though his imaginative power is considerably less; and he rarely lapses into the merely tawdry or the merely sentimental. His philosophy is a good deal saner and less windy than George Sand's (though, as we have seen, he too has a slight weakness for apocalypses), and he has a good deal more of the practical spirit than the Châtelaine of Nohant. Neither of his forerunners was a very distinguished practitioner of purely literary criticism, nor is M. Renan. His opinions on certain points are too definitely and obtrusively present with him for that, and he does not attain to the absolute catholicity which is the first requisite of the literary critic. It is doubtful whether in this direction he

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could even get as far as the paradox of Thackeray on Swift—"I suppose there is no person who reads but must admire . . . and I say that, great as he is, we should hoot him." The desire to hoot would get the better even of the preliminary admiration in M. Renan's case. But if his value as a critic of literature be unequal, it is still considerable. His remarks on the classical French literature of the seventeenth century are among the very best ever made by a Frenchman, being equally distant from the parrot-cry of admiration which is now raised more loudly than ever by the neo-classic school in France, and from the exaggerated depreciation of the *romantique à tous crins*. Yet his real value is not that of a critic of letters so much as that of a critic of life. In face of what, with a fine confusion of language, are sometimes called the positive and sometimes the negative tendencies of the day, tendencies which in any case make for a certain hardness of moral texture, the presence of an authority of this kind, taking up his parable and preaching charity, mutual good-will, the admiration of harmless things, and the cultivation of blameless feelings, ought to be counted as on the whole a healthy influence. It is the business no doubt of the avowedly religious person to perform this same function, and to a great extent he does perform it, but in the case of those who do not agree with him he suffers from the reciprocal conjugation of the historical

ERNEST RENAN.

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verb *je suis suspect, tu es suspect*, etc. The extremer political reformer is very much more occupied in furthering his views at any cost than in taking measures to prevent his own manners or anybody else's from becoming fierce. Ordinary politicians and ordinary men of business have something else to do, and are naturally inclined to look upon the function as by no means a practical one. The quaint sentence of surprised contempt which M. Renan in his essay on Channing devotes to the temperance movement, points out excellently the gulf between the philanthropist of the professional kind and his own larger, if vaguer, philanthropy. To say anything about men of science is as dangerous in these days as it once was to say anything about bishops, but it may at least be hinted that the cultivation of the softer feelings has not hitherto received any very active assistance from them. Last of all comes the class of professed devotees of literature and art; among whom, after a manner, M. Renan himself must be classed. Their attitude towards his methods and aims is perhaps not less unfavourable than that of other classes. They have, as was hinted at the beginning, a natural horror of anything like "gush," and they have had so much trouble to keep their own studies clear of the question of moral tendency and influence, that they are apt to look on that question with disfavour. Hence sentiment, as distinguished from

ERNEST RENAN.

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passion on one side, business on another, and devotion on a third, has not recently had a good time of it in the world, being regarded by some as a mere counterfeit of something better; by others, as unpractical and womanish; by others, again, as leading to absurdities and slips of taste which should, above all things, be avoided. It is in the gap thus formed that M. Renan has with sufficient courage taken his stand. His gospel may certainly be said to be a vague gospel, and the enemy may contend that Morgane la Fée is architect and clerk of the works at the buildings which he so industriously edifies with graceful words and, at the same time, with a vast quantity of solid learning. But of his literary skill there can be no question, and scarcely less of the admirable character of his intentions.

ERNEST RENAN.

The concluding volume of his great work is a fitting close to the whole, and moreover one of its most interesting parts. In Marcus Aurelius M. Renan found an example of one of those fortunate persons whom, as he himself said in a juvenile work many years ago, "la tempête a laissés au milieu du grand océan pacifique, mer sans vagues et sans rivages, où l'on n'a d'autre étoile que la raison, ni d'autre boussole que son cœur." Marcus has not exactly produced this effect upon all his readers, but it is all the more interesting to see in what manner he produced the effect on M. Renan. This effect has given us a very satisfactory volume

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both from the literary and philosophical point of view. From the former M. Renan has enriched the world with a great deal of excellent work, free from the stiffness and aridity which too often characterise the work of learned writers, possessed of a singular and somewhat feminine charm of suppleness, softness, and colour, but seldom deserving the unfavourable epithets of effeminacy, flaccidity, or tawdriness. From the latter he has supplied a distinct want in the thought of the time by advocating charity in the full Pauline sense against egotism, morality against mere æstheticism or mere intellectualism, attention to the spiritual as contrasted with the merely material interests of humanity. I happen (were this of the slightest importance) to differ from his views on a great majority of points, from the life of Christ to the advantages of living in common, and from Marcus Aurelius to Béranger. It has been all the greater pleasure to me to try and appreciate his literary character and position, in what I conceive to be the only spirit allowable for the critic.

ERNEST RENAN.

The preceding pages were written in 1880, when M. Renan came to London to deliver the Hibbert Lectures for that year. They comprise a pretty complete survey of his literary work up to that date; and I think they may be without difficulty wrought into a still more complete estimate both of his work and of his life. The life, it is to

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ERNEST RENAN.

be hoped, may be prolonged, but the character of the work is not likely to be much affected by any subsequent production, remarkable as is the produce which these ten years have yielded. The *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse* have given a certain right to speak of the life of a man still living, a subject which, without such provocation, is in my judgment always better avoided; the work has been increased and its characteristics deepened and emphasised (not, I fear it must be said, always favourably) by the chief of the volumes published since the *Drames Philosophiques*, the *Histoire d'Israël*, and the long post-dated *Avenir de la Science*.

Ernest Joseph Renan was born at Tréguier on the 27th of February 1823, and from very early days was destined to the priesthood. He has told us how, when a seminarist at Saint-Sulpice, he found himself dissatisfied with his proposed profession and the creed which it involved. Or rather he has *not* told us. No man ever tells that story with perfect sincerity; there go too many and too subtle influences to the making of it. Nor in a purely literary study of M. Renan is there any need to inquire into these influences. It is sufficient to say that his clerical studies determined him in that way of Semitic science in which he persevered when the original determining influence had ceased. I have been assured of his competence in it by undoubted authorities, who frankly

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confessed at the same time that they approved neither of his original instruction nor of his later method. For a time he divided his attention between Semitic and mediæval subjects, and his first notable book of a literary character was that on Averroes, above referred to; though it will be observed that here the two studies met. He became an official of the Bibliothèque Nationale, was favoured in divers ways by divers administrations, and in 1860 was sent to Syria on one of those "missions," which are so incomprehensible to the British and so convenient to the French man of letters. He was shortly afterwards made Professor of Hebrew at the Collége de France.

ERNEST RENAN.

But meanwhile there had appeared, as a consequence chiefly of his Syrian visit, the famous *Vie de Jésus*, which developed itself into the many-volumed *Origines du Christianisme*. The clamour raised against his appointment to a professorship was for a time successful, and M. Renan, as he must have anticipated, had to bear much harsh language. His career, however, at least since 1870, has been one of genuine success, though he never was able to enter the Chamber, despite various attempts. Of late years he has taken up a peculiar attitude, of which the before-mentioned *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse* were in a sort the manifesto—an attitude of benevolent condescension both to the faiths which he has left and to the unfaiths which in a manner have left him. This

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ERNEST RENAN.

is not an easy attitude to maintain without slips of taste, and M. Renan has been sufficiently guilty of them; but it has been to some extent excused in his case by the unquestioned supremacy which time and his own merits have given him among French men of letters. There is at the present moment no one who can write French of the best kind as M. Renan can write it; and it would not be altogether just to attribute this merely to the lapse of time, the death of rivals, and the disuse of good practice by the younger generation. A man who between sixty and seventy can produce such work as the books I have named, work in some respects revealing new faculties and in none showing any degeneration, as far as literature goes, of the old, is rare in any literary history.

We need not delay very long over *L'Avenir de la Science*, which could hardly have been published forty years after date (the original publication having been prevented by sage counsel of friends and the revolution of February) by any man who was less serenely conscious of his own value, or whose literary position was less sure. M. Renan has belittled the formal value of the book in his preface so ingeniously that there is nothing left to say of that. But in truth and in fact its substantial worth is very small except for biographical purposes; and even here a tolerably experienced student of human nature in general, and of M. Renan's nature in particular,

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could almost dispense with it. Take a young man of great intellectual ability, and still greater (though as yet undeveloped) literary faculty; suppose in him a wide course of reading and the mental excitement caused on one hand by the abandonment of his faith of his childhood and the presence everywhere of novel ideas, socialist and other; add the study of German models which inclined him to throw his random thoughts on things in general into a form of quasi-system; add yet again the industry necessary to write five hundred large pages of rather close print—and you have *L'Avenir de la Science.*

ERNEST RENAN.

Very different are the two other works to which I have referred. The *Histoire d'Israël* is one of the most extraordinary books ever written. With no loss of literary power, it exaggerates the oddities in method of the *Origines* to a tenfold degree. One of the most diverting critical exercises known to me is that of the late M. Scherer on its first volume. M. Scherer was by no means an orthodox person; he had (later and after far more struggles) gone through the same process which M. Renan performed rather light-heartedly at Saint-Sulpice; he admired the style; he was not shocked at the conclusions. But as a serious critic he was very much shocked at the method. He grows almost plaintive over it. "Il fait usage," cries he, "du document condamné comme s'il ne l'avait pas condamné!" Elsewhere "il généralise des

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faits individuels, il érige des faits accidentels en usages constants." Elsewhere, again, "il lui arrive parfois d'insérer dans son récit un détail qui complète l'image et la situation sauf à nous déclarer en note qu'il n'en faut rien croire." Alas! it is but too true; it is even a great deal less than the truth. Let any one turn to the first volume and examine the structure which M. Renan has built out of the single and doubtful word "Jacobel"; to the second, and digest the marvellous romance in which, by combining the Book of Kings with the forty-fifth Psalm, applying the terms of the latter to Ahab's bride, and adding any quantity of his own peculiar sentiment, he has succeeded in making a Jezebel who is a sort of compound of Mary Queen of Scots, Maria Theresa, Aspasia, Semiramis, and Cleopatra; to the third, and contemplate the picture of the last days of Jerusalem before the Babylonish conquest. If, knowing something of criticism and of logic, he be a serious person, he will, like M. Scherer, be aghast. If he unite frivolity with the same knowledge, he will be in constant fits of laughter. Never was such iconoclasm joined to such castle-building on nothing,—such a determination not to accept documents as wholly true, mingled with such willingness to accept any part that can be made convenient, without the slightest evidence that it is more trustworthy than its context. The book sometimes reads like a designed caricature of the author's own methods in

ERNEST RENAN.

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the earlier *Origines*, the methods of conjectural restoration which I have indicated. In face of this caricature it is perhaps a critical duty to speak more bluntly, and pronounce the whole thing delightful but preposterous. It is indeed no wonder that writers like M. Scherer should have looked gravely on it. For it is something worse than a caricature of M. Renan ; it is a caricature, and a very damaging one, of the whole methods of biblical criticism. And it must have made not a few readers ask themselves whether other professors of that certainly not too modest science, though they may lack M. Renan's exuberance, his luxuriance, and his literary skill, are not at bottom one with him in the habit of arbitrary selection and unfounded judgment.

ERNEST RENAN.

These books, though they brought out and threw up some of the defects in M. Renan's literary character, showed him in no absolutely new light. The *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse* and still more the *Drames Philosophiques* (the series of which had just been opened with *Caliban* when I wrote originally, and which were later completed by *L'Eau de Jouvence*, *Le Prêtre de Némi* and *L'Abbesse de Jouarre*), did to a certain extent exhibit him in such a light, the effects of which were partly favourable and partly not. The *Drames* in particular may count among the most remarkable work that a man verging on his sixtieth year with the first of them, and long past it at the date of the last, ever

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ERNEST RENAN.

produced. They had a great success—in the case of the last a success decidedly of scandal; and however mixed may be the feelings of admiration with which a pure taste may regard them, they are certainly clever (a word which I select advisedly) in the very highest degree. One part of their cleverness lies in the manifold and apparently indiscriminate satire which the author pours on things and persons, without ever running into the cut-and-dried. Democracy and aristocracy, the classes and the masses, religion and irreligion, worldliness and unworldliness, morality and immorality, all come in for this satire; and if there are not infrequent lapses of taste, there are few of brains. The most curious thing—not entirely unexpected perhaps by careful readers, but still curious—was the development of a sort of refined but rather ungentlemanly sensuality which M. Renan showed. There is no coarseness in any of these books. But in parts of *L'Eau de Jouvence*, in the treatment if not the *donnée* of *L'Abbesse de Jouarre*, and in some prefatory remarks to the *Souvenirs* especially, there is a most singular Cyrenaicism. The Royaume de Dieu becomes a sort of Otaheite, and each shepherd, provided that he has previously taken all his degrees and is an enlightened person, is permitted, nay! encouraged, to clasp his yielding fair one in the sage's sight. The effect was not altogether delightful, owing to a sentiment of human nature

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which has been put magisterially by the bagman in *Pickwick*. "You all know, gentlemen, to hear an old fellow who ought to know better talking about these things is very unpleasant." M. Renan has even shocked some disciples and critics, not always old fogies, who cannot pretend to be at all strait-laced in their own principles and practice, and he certainly has exhibited the operations of the spirit in a manner suited not only to shock those who are sensitive, but to cause those of them who are critical and combative to blaspheme him with no small show of reason.

These later works, indeed, while even increasing one's respect for M. Renan's cleverness, for his wonderful command of French, and so forth, may serve to emphasise and fill in a judgment which, as the acute reader will have perceived, was adumbrated from the beginning of the foregoing essay. In some purely literary gifts M. Renan has had few superiors among the men of our time. Never sublime or manly, he can touch almost every chord within the range of the French language except the chords of manliness and sublimity. Pathos, gentle satire, pure narration, exposition which is half argument and half narrative, imaginative construction, supple and subtle interpretation; he can do them all, and do them goldenly. In three things, and three things only, does he go wrong—in his excess of egotism, in his defect of taste, which comes from a defect of reverence, and in

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ERNEST RENAN.

the weakness of his reasoning power, properly so called. It may be that egotism is a specially French quality, though it is fair to say that third parties do not seem to see much difference between French and English in this matter. But in M. Renan, whether as a matter of idiosyncrasy or a matter of nationality, it has reached its climax. The mere presence of the *je* and the *moi-même* (though perhaps he abuses even them when his subjects are considered) would go for nothing. But every sentence, though the *moi haïssable* may be leagues off in appearance, is saturated with self-consciousness. Even Byron is not M. Renan's superior or inferior in always thinking of himself whatsoever he is writing about. This of itself would argue a defect of taste; but the defect is shown in other ways which have been glanced at both in the earlier and in the later part of this essay. I have heard him accused of "greasiness," and I am afraid there is a good deal to be said for the charge. Whether it be due to the advanced age at which he became an erotic writer, or to some other cause, he is deficient in passion. The breaking of her vows by the Abbesse de Jouarre, on the supposed eve of her execution, is not an impossible subject by any means, though it is a difficult one; it is made impossible, or at least offensive, simply by M. Renan's own manner of dealing with it.

Perhaps, however, all his defects may be set

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down to the weakness of his reasoning power, which for a professed philosopher is remarkable, and is scarcely less obvious than that of Victor Hugo. The paralogisms and question-beggings visible in the *Origines* and glaring in the *Histoire d'Israël* may be paralleled from every division of his work. And so the adversary may say, without too much injustice, of M. Renan that to the discussion of the most serious of subjects he brings chiefly the faculties of a novelist, or rather those of a poet who should happen to be incapacitated for writing poetry and for feeling it in its noblest forms, and who can but write soft, warm, exquisitely coloured, exquisitely undulating and palpitating prose.[1] [1892.]

ERNEST RENAN.

[1] The publication, while this volume was passing through the press, of a new collection of M. Renan's miscellanies entitled *Feuilles Détachées*, necessitates no alteration in the above postscript. Indeed both the text and the preface (the latter partly apologetic) only illustrate further what is there said.

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V

THOUGHTS ON REPUBLICS[1]

THOUGHTS ON REPUBLICS.

IT is perhaps too much the custom of those of us who earn our bread by surveying mankind from China to Peru, and writing daily or weekly articles on politics, to take things as they come weekly or daily, and indulge in no further reflections on them. Some indeed have said that it is not the custom of the present day to indulge in further reflections upon anything; and there are even those who, going yet more to extremes, add that it is a very fortunate thing, the affairs of the moment, and especially the political affairs, being remarkably ill-suited to bear reflection of any kind, above all the "further" kind. Once it was different, and the political article of the day took the form of *The Character of a Trimmer*, or *The Conduct of the Allies*. Let it be allowed to a political journalist of some years' standing—than

[1] Written shortly after the expulsion of the Emperor Dom Pedro of Brazil. The experiences of the Brazilian Republic since have not weakened whatever force there may be in these *Thoughts*.

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whom nobody can be more conscious of the difference between himself and Halifax or Swift—to muse for a while, in the temper of their musing if not with the merit of their expression, on the latest of modern revolutions, the revolution which had the happy thought of making the centenary of 1789 practical. And let this musing take for its subject, first, some expressed opinions on the birth of the Brazilian Republic, then Republics themselves, Brazilian and other.

It was natural, no doubt, that the action of the patriotic Marshal Deodoro da Fonseca and his band of brothers should attract most and earliest comment from sympathisers. Mr. Gladstone told us, as an afterthought, that his own benediction on the infant Republic was bestowed in respect rather of the unobtrusive and unsanguinary manner of its birth than of its Republican character. Not all commentators showed even this Epimethean cautiousness. One bird of freedom (I forget its actual perch, but it was somewhere between Maine and Florida) clapped its wings at once over the fact that its own species were now crowing from Cape Horn to the St. Lawrence—the bird forgot Honduras, where the shadow of tyranny still broods, but no matter. Echoes of the crowing in England asked how any one could wonder that a people should prefer managing its own affairs to having its affairs managed for it, even by a sovereign of liberal ideas, benevolent aspirations,

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culture, scientific acquirements, and so forth. And some dispirited Monarchists seem to have found little to reply except in groans, after the manner of a Greek chorus, that a Republican dog should have been found to bite so good a man as Dom Pedro. Whether the Brazilian Monarchy had, at any rate for some half century of its not much longer existence, been much more than a Monarchy in name; whether the substitution of Senhor Deodoro da Fonseca for Dom Pedro d'Alcantara was much more than a case of *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*; whether a Republic established by a handful of soldiers and schemers in one or two great towns of a thinly peopled country covering half a continent could be said to have any meaning as an expression of popular will—these were questions about which none of the eulogists of the Brazilians for daring to be free troubled themselves. But what they troubled themselves about least of all was a set of questions lying much further back—the questions: What is a Republic? Is there more freedom under a Republic than under any other form of government? Is it physically possible for a Republic to conduct public affairs on Republican principles, if those principles are summed up or even distantly indicated by the phrase "managing one's own affairs instead of having them managed by somebody else," or, as that eminent politician, Mark Twain, prefers to put it, "every man having a say in the government"?

THOUGHTS ON REPUBLICS.

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In considering these interesting questions we shall receive much assistance from one of the copious telegrams in composing which the Provisional Government of Brazil appeared to delight. "It is a mistake," says the Provisional Government, "to suppose that it [the Constituent Assembly] will have to decide between the Republic and the Monarchy. The Monarchy is out of the question —the Constituent Assembly will only have to organise the Republic." And again: "Every attempt to disturb the peace shall be stamped out with unflinching severity." These authoritative declarations of Republican principles, set forth by the youngest and therefore perhaps the most infallible, certainly the least fossil, of Republics, are very welcome and very instructive to the thinker on that form of polity. He might have thought (if he had been a very inexperienced thinker) that it was the business of a Constituent Assembly to constitute: he now sees that it is only its business to accept something already constituted. And he might have thought (but here he would certainly have shown himself yet more inexperienced) that if there was one thing that a Republic could not consistently do it would be to "stamp out with unflinching severity attempts to disturb the peace" —that is to say, translating official into plain language, attempts to change the government. The cardinal principle of the Republic is, one is told, the management of one's own affairs. One,

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being a Brazilian, tries to do this: and, lo! there appears on this side a grave pundit, pointing out that it may only be done in one particular way; and on that side a valiant marshal still more significantly ready to stamp out anybody who wants to do it in any other. There is plenty of *imperium* so long as a sufficient number of Fonsecists are ready to follow their Deodoro; but where, oh where, is the *libertas*?

THOUGHTS ON REPUBLICS.

It would, however, be extremely unphilosophical to visit this inconsistency on the heads of the Generals Marmalade and Lemonade, the *rastaquouères retour de l'Europe*, the lawyers in want of a place, and the journalists with great French pseudonyms, who made the Brazilian Revolution. It is theirs by race—they are at least Republican in this little weakness. If it is too much to ask lazy memories of recent years to go back a quarter of a century and compare the almost contemporary methods of Wittgenstein and Sherman, to draw the parallel and strike the balance between the fate of the kingdom of Poland and the fate of the sovereign states of Virginia and Mississippi, let us take more recent and less alarming instances—for example, the incidents of a certain contest between persons of the names of Tilden and Hayes, not so very long ago, or the eminent exploits of M. Constans in France yet more recently. *Nec Sthenebœa minus quam Cressa*: there is uncommonly little to choose between the methods in any case just

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cited or referred to. Whether the people has to be made to exercise its peaceful rights in the way that is best for it, or whether its unrighteous attempts to "disturb the peace" have to be "stamped out," they are all in a tale, from never mind what autocrat to Fonseca, Barbosa, Constant, and Company. "Ah! but," says our friend of the last years of the nineteenth century, "what a difference! Here you are stamped out by a tyrant: there by the majesty of the people." Now, for my own private part I should have an almost equal objection to be stamped out by anybody. But from the point of view of my friend, I should have an infinitely greater objection to be stamped out by the majesty of the people; and it may not be impertinent—since in most political discussions of the day it seems to be wholly forgotten—to indicate the point of this doubtless most unreasonable view.

Your Monarchy (at least your real Monarchy, for it may be admitted that the constitutional variety, though it keeps the main structure of theory, has rather endangered the argumentative buttresses) is thoroughly logical. For the purpose of governing, you discover or invent a species different from the governed—not necessarily better (that is the error of Mr. Andrew Carnegie and his likes)—but different and indisputable. You may be as good a gentleman as the king, but you are not the king, and as you can't become the king you

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are neither jealous of him nor feel yourself degraded by his existence. *C'est son métier à lui d'être Roi*: it is your business on your part to be loyal. There is no competition: therefore there is no emulation: therefore there is no ill-feeling. The bulls in Egypt who had not the Apis marks might as well have been jealous of the bull that had. And these things being so, the right of the king to cut off heads, to impose laws, to "stamp out," is quite unquestionable. If you want to question it you take your life in your hands, you rebel, and you win or you don't. If you don't, it is part of the game that you should be "stamped out," and no reasonable man who plays quarrels with the game. You go to the gallows, the block, the garrotting chair, as Mr. Thackeray says somewhere, with "manly resignation though with considerable disgust"; but you do not feel that any one has altered the laws of the game while you were playing. In a less tragic and more conventional state of things there is the same consolation. A law is passed, and you do not like it. You have fought against it to the utmost of your powers; you have voted against it; you have written the most admirable and unanswerable articles against it. But it is passed, and you submit. Why? Not because it has passed the Commons, whom you elect in part, whose majority, if against you, has been elected by persons who were your own equals (to say nothing less); not because it has

THOUGHTS ON REPUBLICS.

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passed the Lords, whose political position you admit as an excellent thing, but to none of whom do you pay any more personal respect than to any other gentleman. Hundreds of Bills pass both Houses separately: several every year merely miss the double passing by accident. All are waste paper till they receive the Royal Assent. It is the Royal Assent that you obey. They tell you it cannot be refused: but what does that matter? The important point is that, "cannot" or no "cannot," nothing is valid till it is given. You are not bidden to obey by Johnson or Thompson, but by the king; if you disobey, it is the king who hangs you, not Thompson or Johnson. The game is played throughout: and let me repeat, no rational man minds losing when the game is played.

But the Republic never plays the game. Its whole force, its whole appeal, rests on the consent of the citizens, just as the force and appeal of the Monarchy rest either on the negation of that consent altogether or on the hypothesis that once given it cannot be retracted. And yet, as the Brazilian Government so kindly pointed out afresh to us, it cannot get itself constituted, it cannot carry on government for a week or two, without casting consent to the winds and levelling rifles at dissenters. It is quite heartrending to think of the sufferings of a logical victim of any anti-Republican counter-pronunciamiento at Rio.

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THOUGHTS ON REPUBLICS.

Keen are the pangs of being stamped out in any case, but keener far to feel that you are being stamped out contrary to the laws of the game. The nation, let us say, consists of a hundred persons. Fifty-one vote for a Republic, forty-nine wish for a Monarchy. Man for man, vote for vote, there is no conceivable difference between the value of the individuals and the value of their desires; yet the purely accidental, irrelevant, and irrational fact of fifty people agreeing with A and only forty-eight with B, gives A the power to tyrannise over B just as much as any Pedro, cruel or cultured, would do. B's liberty becomes, for the nonce, a quantity negligible and neglected—it is his *ex hypothesi*, but if he attempts to use it he is stamped out. This is bad enough, but worse remains behind, a still more hideous self-contradiction. Fifty-one persons, as we have said, vote for a Republic, the fiftieth and fifty-first being, let us say, João and Beltrão. A week, a day, an hour afterwards João and Beltrão change their highly respectable minds. It may be that the actual revolution has not recognised their merits sufficiently in the distribution of spoils. It may be that a real counter-revolution has effected itself in their opinions. But whatever the cause, the two fall off, attempt to assert their new principles, fail, the power being in the other hands, and are stamped out. Now, reflect on the horror of this, which is a much more exquisite

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horror than the other. Not only are these two poor men stamped out in defiance of the Republican principle that the citizen's political affairs shall be managed by him, not for him, but they are now actually part of the majority—the minority having become such by the transference of their voices. Therefore they ought to be hanging others instead of being hanged themselves; therefore a most ghastly act of high treason to the Republic is being committed; therefore (always on strict Republican principles) Freedom ought to shriek over them as loud as over Kosciusko, and much louder than over Kossuth.

Here the practical man, the practical Republican, finding that he cannot (as indeed it is quite impossible) find any technical flaw in this unpleasant chain of reasoning, will doubtless cry, "This logic-chopping is all very fine, but it is purely academic. You know very well that no government can be carried on unless the will of the majority is deferred to; unless that majority is supposed to remain intact for some more or less considerable time; unless the central authority puts down breaches of the peace." Unfortunate practical man! In less than half a dozen lines he has accumulated all the worst fallacies, the most degrading sophistries (according to Republican argument), of the politics of despotism. The paramount importance of order, the right of the strongest, the necessity of obeying convention, the

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THOUGHTS ON REPUBLICS.

superiority of expediency to justice—all the tyrant's pleas, all the sycophant's justifications, here they once more rear their horrid heads and hiss their poisonous venom. Not a word has the practical man said, not a single way or byway of argument has he indicated, which would not justify Jeffreys and bear Bomba harmless through. On the Monarchical side his arguments are good enough and consistent enough. It is, indeed, the common-sense basis of the Legitimist-Monarchical contention that to obviate civil dissension and disorder by making the possession of supreme power dependent, if not upon some essential quality, yet upon some inseparable and incommunicable accident, is the first object of politics, and that everything must give way to this. The Republican who admits this, or anything like it, is lost.

And he is more lost still if we meet him on another part of the field, a very favourite part with him, the question of personal dignity. To listen to democrats of the Carnegie stamp one would imagine that the true subjects of a Monarchy were always and necessarily tormented with a sense of inferiority to their "betters." We have already seen how far this is from the truth, though it may be admitted that it gives an interesting light on the point of view of those who say it. *They*, it is clear, have this uneasy sense of being in the presence of "betters." And, indeed, it would be odd if they had not. It is impossible

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to imagine anything more galling to the sense of personal dignity than existence as one of the minority in a Republic. You are by hypothesis as good as the President, of equal political rights with the President, as well entitled to have your say (*vide* Mr. Clemens) on any matter as the President. And yet—as if there never had been any godlike stroke of Brutus, any Rütli, any Lexington, any Jeu de Paume—the President can give places, can sanction legislation, can even, as few haughty monarchs dare to do, veto it. And you can do just nothing at all but shoot him, which exposes you to the most unpleasant consequences. Even if you got out of this by regarding the President as a gilded slave, as your paid man, as a creature handshakable *à merci et à miséricorde*, there remains the abominable inequality of Jones, conferred upon Jones by Equality, and not tempered by any possible considerations of the sort. If Jones happens to be a member of the majority, and you happen to be a member of the minority, you are for years practically the slave of Jones. You may not politically do or say the thing you will, but the thing that Jones wills. You make war with foreign nations at the discretion of Jones; you violently object to a disgraceful peace with them, and Jones quietly makes it; you are an ardent Free-trader, and Jones studies with practical success to make you, in your capacity as citizen, a Protectionist more

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wicked than the late Sir Richard Vyvyan himself; you are a non-interventionist, and Jones sends the ironclads, for which you pay, to bombard harmless towns; you like an honest glass of beer, and Jones sends you to prison if you drink it. This is "managing your own affairs"; this is Liberty; this is Equality; this is having a say in the government. And the only possible consolation —that perhaps after the next election you may take your revenge on Jones, may make peace with his enemies and bombard his friends, may sweep away his tariff and give instead a State bounty to every brewer and every distiller—ought not, if you are a real Republican, to give you the slightest comfort. Ejuxria or Utopia ought no more to be governed in opposition to the wishes of a free Ejuxrian or Utopian like Jones than it ought to be governed in opposition to your own. You are as false to your principles in tyrannising as in being tyrannised over. Perhaps it is a hidden sense of this hopeless contradiction, of this inextricable dilemma, that has made Republicans from time to time so fond of the maxim, "Be my brother or I will kill you." Only when all the citizens are your brothers in opinion, or when you have killed all who are not, can you get the Republic theoretically to work. And alas! you know very well that if you did get it so to work there would be a split next day. You must do the thing that Jones wishes, and you do not;

THOUGHTS ON REPUBLICS.

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or the thing that Jones does not wish, and you do. In either case you are false to your principles; in one case you are a slave (and therefore degraded), in the other a tyrant, and therefore (see all the Republican copy-books) much more degraded than a slave. THOUGHTS ON REPUBLICS.

It may seem, then, necessary to inquire a little how it is that anybody consents to live under such an odious and illogical form of government; next to inquire further how it is that any one can be found to exchange more intelligent varieties for it. As to which points there were much to be said. The candid man will confess on the one hand that even in these restless days people are by no means inordinately given to examining the first principles of their beliefs; on the other that Monarchies themselves have for many years taken to playing with Republican principles so much that a little confusion is inevitable and excusable. But there are some considerations which may be put. In the first place your Republic (*teste* its great expositor before cited) offers every man "a say in the government." He doesn't get it: as I have humbly endeavoured to prove, it is practically impossible that he should get it; but it is offered him—it is the gold piece in the child's pocket. Then the Republic tells him that he is "as good as anybody else." He is not: it proceeds to show him as much in the very first division where he happens to be in the minority; but it

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tells him that he is, and he believes it. Furthermore, the Republic appeals, as no Monarchy can possibly appeal, to the gambling instinct in human nature, to the instinct of vanity, and to the instinct of greed. Let me guard promptly against the charge of having duplicated in the matter of gambling and greed. They are not the same instinct by any means. Under the domination of greed a man makes for certain gain, and is purely actuated by considerations thereof. Show him that he may even probably lose and his zeal is cooled at once. The gambling instinct is quite different. Here the element of attraction is not certainty but uncertainty; the prospect of gain is alluring, no doubt, but it is rather a question whether the risk of loss has not something alluring in it also. The real point is the chance, the uncertainty, the gamble: so much so that men have often been known to venture quite disproportionate stakes in business, in sport, in love, in war, simply for the excitement, for the "flutter."

THOUGHTS ON REPUBLICS.

Now, in all these points the Republic has more to offer than the Monarchy. Its general bonus, the attraction of "no ticket without a prize" which it offers, is addressed to vanity. It is dear to the uninstructed and unintelligent man to be told that he has no betters, that he is as good as anybody else. The instructed and intelligent man knows that if twenty Constitutions brayed

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these assertions at him through twenty thousand trumpets they would still be false. A would be handsomer, B taller, C more gifted, and therefore it matters very little to him whether D is more "privileged." The *ultima ratio* of relative value after all depends on a man's own estimate of his own worth, and is not affected by any Constitution. But to the majority, who are either not conscious of possessing any worth at all, or painfully doubtful as to the accuracy of their own judgment, it is no doubt comforting to be told that they are as good as anybody else. At any rate it would seem to be so. And so the Republic hits the majority of its birds on this wing.

Others it hits from the point of view of downright greed. This is not a pleasant consideration, but men are what they are. There can be no question either with any historical student or with any student of actual politics that "Republic" usually spells "corruption." It always has been so; it is so; in the nature of things it must always be so. No doubt Monarchies have known plentiful waste and plentiful malversation of public money; but the thing has been limited to comparatively few persons, and has always had more or less specious excuses of services rendered, or of the giving away of property which was the king's property, not the nation's. It was a Republic which invented the plain, simple, unblushing doctrine of "the spoils to

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the victors," and long before a Republic had formulated the doctrine, almost all Republics had favoured the practice. To make the most out of Jones while you have the upper hand of him; to lay up for yourself as much as possible against the evil day when Jones shall have the upper hand of you—this stands, if not to reason, yet to human nature. The king is always restrained to a certain extent by simple considerations of prudence; it is not worth his while to kill the goose for the sake of the golden eggs. The temporarily dominant party in a Republic is under an exactly opposite temptation. Why keep the goose for the possible, nay certain, benefit of the abominable Jones? To which it has to be added that, pretend the contrary who may, it is impossible to feel a genuine sense of duty towards what is only an exaggeration, to the *n*-th power, of oneself. The sole claim which a Republic has to the obedience, the respect, the loyalty, of each man is his own consent to it; and his respect for its property must necessarily, however loudly on his moral days he may proclaim the contrary, be conditioned by that fact. He says—not as a personal brag, not as an exaggeration, but as a plain statement of logical and political first principle—*L'État c'est moi.* Nor is it at all surprising that he should go on, "The property of the State is my property," and proceed to effect restitution of the said property to its owner.

THOUGHTS ON REPUBLICS.

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But most of all does the Republic appeal to the gambling element in man. Under the Monarchy, the big prize is by hypothesis unattainable; even the middle chances are usually and in practice restricted to a small, or comparatively small, number of persons. And not only the actual distribution of the loaves and fishes, but the whole course of public life generally offers much less of the temptation of the unforeseen than is the case under the Republic. In some examples thereof every other man you meet may be said, without much exaggeration, to be an ex-Minister: and if that seem not a very delightful state it has to be remembered that every ex-Minister hopes to be Minister again, and that every one who looks upon an ex-Minister says to himself "What he was yesterday I may be to-morrow." The famous jest of the old, the real, Revolution, to the unfortunate producer of title-deeds centuries old, "If you have had it so long, citizen, it is time for some other citizen to take his turn," is hardly a burlesque of actual Republican sentiment, and not a burlesque at all of the unspoken hope which makes men Republicans.

And so the Republic scores by its appeal to perhaps the strongest, and certainly the most widely diffused of human weaknesses—vanity, greed, the love of the uncertain and the unforeseen, while it hardly loses by its congenital unreasonableness and self-contradiction. It always

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THOUGHTS ON REPUBLICS.

flatters, though it often deceives; it sometimes gives solid rewards, it almost invariably excites, stimulates, interests, allures. The Monarchy, on the other hand, satisfies little but the reason, which is not usually the governing part of that animal which is good enough to call itself rational. It hurts the snob's self-love, it leaves nine greedy men out of ten unfed and without hope of food, it is regular, punctual, humdrum, not interesting. If at crises and intervals it provides opportunities for the display of virtues and graces as rare and delightful as the vices of the Republic, both ordinary and extraordinary, are disgusting, this only happens now and then. Not every day, nor once in every century, shall the words "I have kept the bird in my bosom" fit Sir Ralph Percy's lips. Whereas the particular felicities of "*Respublica*—the public thing," are to be found at any moment quite facile and ready. She is always ready to tickle vanity, to promise satisfaction to greed, to bait the gambling trap with hopes. Therefore, it would appear, she is rather on the winning hand just now, and hopes to be even more so. And if these hopes be realised, the joyful future condition not merely of statesmanship, but of taste, manners, learning, arts, and most other things that make life worth living, may be very easily learnt from the past, and found pretty plentifully illustrated in the present.

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VI

SAINT-EVREMOND

IT is recorded that Archbishop Turpin once appeared in a dream to a trouvère named Nicolas of Padua, and enjoined upon him, for the health of his soul, to put the veracious *Chronique* into verse. This Nicolas proceeded to do, and in order to make the matter sure, extended his version to some twenty thousand lines. On this, M. Léon Gautier, who tells the story, and who, though a pious Catholic, is a Frenchman, remarks, not unnaturally, "Le ciel se gagnait alors bien laborieusement." It is at any rate certain that a good many French authors would, on such terms, have but little chance of any heaven, literary or other; and of hardly any French writer is this truer than of the famous courtier, wit, and free-thinker whose name stands at the head of this page. As a writer, Saint-Evremond, though one of the least voluminous of his kind considering the numerous forms he tried, had once a commanding reputation and influence. The piratical

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SAINT-EVREMOND.

booksellers of the end of the seventeenth century are said to have more frequently ordered "du Saint-Evremond" from their hacks than any other compound, and to this day it is sometimes difficult to separate accurately the false work from the true in what is attributed to him. Although Voltaire was not too just to his forerunner, the popular estimate of the relation in which the two stand to one another is sufficiently accurate. With Pascal and Bayle, Saint-Evremond constitutes the immediate literary ancestry of the author of *Candide*, and perhaps displays more of the special characteristics of his descendant than either of the other two. Yet it would probably be difficult, even for those who have more knowledge of French literature than the average Englishman possesses, to name many of Saint-Evremond's works, much more to give an account of them. For Englishmen, however, Saint-Evremond has some special interest. He lived for nearly half his long life amongst us, and, unlike some other refugees, he had a decided love for our nation. He was the first Frenchman of distinction to give anything like a rational or critical account of any portion of English literature. Besides all this, and notwithstanding the fact that he was a Frenchman of Frenchmen, he had a strongly English vein in his composition, and serves as a link to explain the close connection that for some half-century at least existed between English and French belles-lettres, a connection

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which was by no means a matter of mere court influence or fashion.

SAINT-EVREMOND.

Charles de Marguetel de Saint-Denis was born at Saint-Denis-le-Guast, near Coutances, on the 1st of April 1610, and died at London on the 20th of September 1703. Men of letters in France in the seventeenth century, who were also men of rank, had a curious habit of living to the most surprising ages, and Saint-Evremond, like Fontenelle and Saint-Aulaire, was almost a centenarian. His family was a good one, allied to the best houses of Normandy, his father was fairly wealthy, and his designation was taken from one of the family estates; but he himself was the third of seven children, and his portion was modest, though sufficient for the time. At no period during his life was he wealthy, and it is only fair to remember that, in his time, almost any man who had birth, brains, and a good address could obtain wealth if he chose. When he was nine years old he was sent to Paris, and entered at that famous school which, under the successive names of Collége de Clermont, Collége Louis le Grand, and Lycée Louis le Grand, has educated so many of the greatest men of France. Like several other pupils of the Jesuits, Saint-Evremond requited the pains of his instructors with not very welcome *θρέπτρα*, but for his special master, the Père Canaye, he seems to have entertained affection, and the raillery with which he treats him in

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a notable Conversation is good-humoured enough.

SAINT-EVREMOND.

After four or five years of school he returned to Normandy, and studied philosophy at Caen, whence he was moved to the Collége d'Harcourt. Destined for the law, he worked for some time at it, but soon took to a more congenial occupation, accompanying Bassompierre and Créqui on the Italian expedition of 1629-1632. After this, the Thirty Years' War gave him abundant occupation in the North, and he served for several years in the Netherlands and on the Rhine, the comfortable system of winter-quarters permitting him plenty of opportunities both of study and society. In 1639 he made the acquaintance of Gassendi, and learnt from the great Neo-Epicurean the doctrines which coloured all the rest of his life and work. He was present at the siege of Arras, at Rocroi, Fribourg, and Nordlingen (in the last of which fights he was severely wounded), at the capture of Dunkirk, at the battle of Lens. This gave him something like twenty years of foreign service, and he afterwards took a part in the intestine disturbances of the Fronde. For many years he was a favourite and constant companion of Condé, but some real or reported slips of his sharp tongue angered the great leader, and Saint-Evremond lost his favour. During the Fronde he adhered steadily to the Royalist side, which he aided not merely with his sword, but with a satire on the Norman partisans of the Duke de Longueville.

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Under his friend, the Duke de Candale, he enjoyed some employments in Guienne, by which he succeeded in amassing, during the space of two years and a half, the sum of fifty thousand livres, a considerable amount for the time, though there does not seem to be any evidence to show that he abused his opportunities. Among his other friends was the common friend of all men of letters, Fouquet, and it was this acquaintance which was at any rate the occasional cause of his disgrace. On Fouquet's downfall he accompanied Louis XIV. to Brittany. But he left behind him, in the care of the superintendent's friend, Madame de Bellière, a case of papers, which fell into the hands of Colbert, as the result of a domiciliary visitation to which the lady was subjected. The case contained a copy of the "Letter on the Peace of the Pyrenees," in which that arrangement was very sharply criticised. Colbert, as usual, did not lose the opportunity of crushing a friend of his rival, and little was wanted to rouse the susceptible vanity of Louis. Warned of danger, Saint-Evremond for a time wandered about the provinces, thinking that the storm might blow over; but it did not, and he finally made his way to England.

Here he was welcomed with open arms by the King, by courtiers of the stamp of Buckingham and Rochester, and by literary men, such as Waller and Hobbes. Charles gave him a pension

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of three hundred a year, which was probably paid, inasmuch as long afterwards we find Saint-Evremond eulogising the place of his exile as one "where guineas were plentiful, and where there was full liberty to spend them." In 1665, the Plague year, he retired to Holland, and stayed there for some time; but England was much more to his taste, and he returned to our shores after a year or two, nor did he ever afterwards quit them. Soon, too, he had an additional tie to the country. Hortense Mancini, Duchess Mazarin, tired of battling with her half-lunatic husband, came to England, and Saint-Evremond at once established himself as her mentor, lover, and satirist, all in one. His influence undoubtedly had not a little to do with the formation of her *salon*, and with its reputation for wit and easy living. In the early days of his exile he had, through the Count de Lionne and others, made some overtures for his recall. There is, however, a sarcastic flavour about his apologies which Louis, who was no dullard, may very possibly have perceived; and besides, it seems probable that Saint-Evremond's free-thinking (though of a very decent, moderate, and unaggressive type) was made to work against him by the King's spiritual advisers. However this may be, no recall was granted, and by degrees Saint-Evremond ceased to desire any; so much so that at length, when, after the English Revolution, a restoration to favour was

SAINT-EVREMOND.

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offered him, he declined it. The Revolution itself made no difference to him. William, whom he had early known and admired in Holland, regarded him with quite as much favour as the Stuarts, and the society of England suited him far better than the new faces and other minds of Versailles could possibly have done. The death of his Hortense in 1699 was doubtless a blow to him; but he survived her as well as William and most of his early friends, dying in 1703 at the age of ninety-three. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, and the soil of Albion, which had certainly not been perfidious to him, still holds his bones. His bust and tablet may be seen in Poets' Corner, immediately to the right of Prior's monument, and above that of Sharp.

SAINT-EVREMOND.

It was in England, and at the extreme end of his life, that the first and only authoritative collection of his works was made. He had long refused to publish, and most of his productions circulated, if they circulated at all, in manuscript. Like all his contemporaries, however, he suffered from pirates, and not unfrequently had "works" of his submitted to him, which did not contain a single line of his writing. At last he took counsel of a well-known man of letters, Des Maizeaux, and put into his hands what he supposed to be the whole of his work. But he seems to have admitted that his memory might in some cases play him false, and advantage of this was taken after

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SAINT-EVREMOND.

his death to begin once more the attribution of spurious works. Saint-Evremond has more than once undergone the process of selection which he both needs and deserves. The most recent of these selections are a volume of the Collection Didot edited by M. Hippeau, another edited by M. Gidel for MM. Garnier, and a better printed and more ambitious one by M. Charles Giraud.[1] The last mentioned contains a huge biographical introduction which takes some four hundred pages to reach the date of its hero's exile, and seems to have been regarded by its author as a sort of waste-pipe for relieving himself of his miscellaneous knowledge of the period.[2] It is remarkable that (at least to my knowledge) none of the industrious publishers who, in the last few years, have put forth pocket-editions *de luxe* of the little masterpieces of French literature, has given a volume or two to the author of the *Conversation du Père Canaye* and the *Letter to Créqui.*

Saint-Evremond's literary attempts did not begin till he had already reached middle life, and till the Thirty Years' War was drawing to a close. I have said that in the intervals of his campaigns he devoted himself to society in Paris. That

[1] All these, or at least the preliminary essays to them, were, I believe, the result of the setting of Saint-Evremond as an Academy Prize subject in 1866. The use of these prizes has sometimes been questioned in England; but here the practice seems justified.

[2] There are many curious notices of M. Giraud, who was one of the *grex* of the Princess Mathilde, in the *Journal des Goncourt.*

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society was in the full swing of the literary fashion which the starting of the Academy and the formation of the Rambouillet and other côteries called forth. Almost the earliest work that came from Saint-Evremond's pen was the *Comédie des Académistes*, a satire on the Immortals which was attributed to more than one of their own body. From that time until his death, nearly sixty years afterwards, it was rare for any considerable time to elapse without his writing something. These productions were invariably of the occasional order. One of the peculiarities of the time was its affection for particular literary forms in which the wits of the period could vie with one another. Such were the famous sonnets of the Uranistes and Jobistes; such the short historic sketches of striking events of which Sarrasin and Retz set the example; such, later, the fairy tales in which mobs of gentlemen and ladies who wrote with more or less ease vainly endeavoured to rival Hamilton and Perrault. There were, however, certain styles which were peculiarly popular, which were specially well suited for this class of composition, and which have resulted, rather surprisingly, in the production of some of the masterpieces of the world's literature. Such are the Pensée, the Maxim, the Portrait, the Conversation. Saint-Evremond did not much affect the shorter forms in which his great contemporaries, Pascal and La Rochefoucauld, were to obtain imperishable renown. But his Characters,

SAINT-EVREMOND.

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his Portraits, and his Conversations are among the very best of their kind. The moralising tendency, of which Montaigne had set the fashion, was never stronger than in him, and he showed it in almost every production of his pen. In the art of tale-telling he had a singular skill, and his short history of the Irish *illuminé*, Valentine Greatrakes, strikes one, as do many of his other writings, with a curious sense of modernness as compared with most of the literature of the period. At all times he was greatly given to professed moralising on religious and philosophical matters, and he has left not a few Pensées, Reflections, and Discours, dealing directly with religion. History, however, and public business were far from being neglected by one who had in his time been an active soldier and politician. His Letter on the Peace of the Pyrenees is, as I have said, the most authentic cause assigned for his disgrace, and his longest and most regular work consists of reflections on the character of the Romans at different times of their history. The historical and moralising spirit unites with that of literary criticism in some papers on the captains of his time,—Turenne, Condé, Beaufort,—and on some of those of antiquity, as well as on the historians, ancient and modern, who had dealt with them.

SAINT-EVREMOND.

A considerable part of his work consists of almost purely literary criticism ; tinged, it is true, by an infusion of the moralising of which

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Saint-Evremond rarely divests himself wholly. He was, like Madame de Sévigné and others of the brightest wits of the time, a staunch supporter of Corneille against the rising popularity of Racine; and his parallel of the latter's *Alexandre* with Corneille's work drew from the older dramatist a warm acknowledgment. Drama, not merely French, but Spanish, Italian, and English, came in for much of his attention, and he has also left a large number of critical discourses in the taste of the time (a taste which perhaps might be revived without much harm) for dealing with more abstract literary questions. Like all his contemporaries he dabbled in poetry, and I fear I cannot say that his dabblings were more successful or more productive than was the case with most of those contemporaries. Last, but not least, comes to be mentioned his correspondence, in which many of his best things occur. Like much other correspondence of the time, it was intended to be at least semi-public, and we find him alluding to expressions of his own in letters which had evidently got abroad and had become the subjects of general comment. Nor was his early legal education entirely without result in the work of his later life, and it may have stood him in some stead when he composed for his beloved Hortense Mancini a formal reply to the formal complaint of her doubtless sorely tried but almost equally trying husband.

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SAINT-EVREMOND.

The *Conversation du Maréchal d'Hocquincourt avec le Père Canaye* is fortunately short enough to be given here in full, with some slight necessary omissions. It needs no prelude except to say that the scene is laid in the middle of the Fronde, that Canaye was Saint-Evremond's tutor at the Collége de Clermont, and that Hocquincourt was a typical French noble of the time and a lover of the famous Madame de Montbazon.

I was dining one day with Marshal d'Hocquincourt at Peronne, when Father Canaye, who was of the party, turned the conversation by degrees upon the submission of reason which religion asks from us. He told us of some bran-new miracles and some entirely modern revelations, and ended by observing that the plague was not more to be shunned than those freethinkers who wish to examine everything by the light of reason.

"Who talks about freethinkers?" said the marshal; "nobody knows them better than I do. Bardouville and Saint-Ibal[1] were my particular friends, and, indeed, 'twas they who drew me over to the side of M. de Soissons against Richelieu. Do I know the freethinkers? Why I could write a book about them and their speeches. When Bardouville died, and Saint-Ibal went to Holland, I made friends with La Frette and Sauveboeuf, who were not exactly geniuses, but very good fellows. La Frette was a capital companion, and a great friend of mine. I think I showed my friendship in his last illness. I saw him dying of low fever like an old woman, and it made me quite mad to think that La Frette, who had fought with the greatest fire-eaters of the time, was going out like a candle. Both of us, Sauveboeuf and myself, were anxious to keep up our

[1] Information about these worthies may be found by any one who wants it in Tallemant des Réaux.

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friend's character, and I made up my mind to blow his brains out that he might die like a man. I was just putting the pistol to his forehead when a rascally Jesuit who was there struck up my arm and spoilt the shot. It vexed me so that I became a Jansenist at once." SAINT-EVREMOND.

"Ah, monseigneur," said Father Canaye, "observe how constantly Satan is on the watch, and how he goes about seeking whom he may devour! You take a trifling grudge against our society, and he improves the occasion to surprise and devour you. Nay, he does worse than devour you, he makes a Jansenist of you. Oh! let us be watchful. It is impossible to be too watchful against the enemy of the human race."

"The father is quite right," said the marshal. "I have been told that the devil never sleeps, and one must meet him on his own terms and keep on the alert. But never mind the devil, let us talk of ourselves. For my part I used to love war above all things, after war Madame de Montbazon, and after Madame de Montbazon philosophy."

"It is reasonable," said the father, "that you should love war, monseigneur, for war loves you, and has loaded you with honours. Do you know that I too am a man of war? The King has made me hospital chaplain in his army of Flanders; is not that being a man of war? Who would ever have believed that Father Canaye would become a soldier? I am one, monseigneur, and I find that I do God just as much service in the camp as I used to do Him at the Collége de Clermont. There is, therefore, no harm in your loving war. To go to war is to serve one's king, and to serve one's king is to serve God. But as for Madame de Montbazon, if you regarded her with eyes of concupiscence, I hope you will excuse my remarking that your wishes were culpable. I am sure, monseigneur, that you did not. You loved her with an innocent affection."

"What, father! do you want to make me out a fool? I can assure you that Marshal d'Hocquincourt has been taught better than that. I meant, father, I meant——— You know quite well what I meant."

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SAINT-EVREMOND.

"Fie! fie! monseigneur; what do you mean by 'I meant'? Our good fathers would be quite shocked at that 'I meant.' But you are joking. When one is an old soldier one becomes accustomed to all sorts of ways of talking. Well! well! as I said, you are joking."

"Not in the least, my good sir," said the marshal. "Do you know how much I loved her?"

"*Usque ad aras*, no doubt, monseigneur."

"I don't know about *aras*, father. But look here," said the marshal, taking up a knife, and gripping the handle very hard, "if she had told me to kill you, this knife would be deep in your heart at this moment."

Now the good father was shocked at the tone of this conversation, and still more at the marshal's excitement. He had recourse to secret prayer, and prayed very heartily to be delivered from his state of peril. But as he was not entirely confident of the success of this method, he kept shuffling away from the marshal by a gentle process of movement on his seat. The marshal followed him in exactly the same way, and as he kept the knife raised, one really might have thought that he was going to carry out his idea. Natural malice made me enjoy his reverence's alarm for a moment, but at last I became afraid that the marshal in his transport might turn jest into earnest, and so I reminded him that, Madame de Montbazon being dead, there was, fortunately, no danger of peril from her to Father Canaye.

"Ah, yes," said the marshal, "heaven does all for the best. The loveliest of all women was beginning to look askance on me. She had a little wretch of an Abbé de Rancé[1] always about her, a miserable little Jansenist, who talked to her in public about grace, and in private about very different subjects. That made me break with the

[1] The legend about Rancé, his discovery of the headless corpse of his mistress, and the consequent founding of La Trappe is famous. It may be doubtful as history, but is far too good to give up as romance.

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Jansenists. Before that I used not to lose a single sermon that Desmares preached, and I swore by all the Port Royal people. Since then I have always had a Jesuit as a confessor, and if my son has sons I will have them educated at the Collége de Clermont on pain of being cut off with a shilling." SAINT-EVREMOND.

"Oh, how admirable are the ways of Providence!" cried Father Canaye. "How deep are the secrets of its policy! A little Jansenist dandy admires a lady of whom monseigneur is fond, and a merciful Providence avails itself of the spirit of jealousy to restore monseigneur to the fold. Wonderful, indeed, are its judgments!"

As soon as the good father had finished these pious reflections, I thought that I might as well say something, and I asked the marshal whether he had not said that philosophy had succeeded Madame de Montbazon in his affections.

"Philosophy![1] I should think so!" he said. "I have been only too fond of it. But I have got clear of it now, and I shall not go back. There was a deuce of a fellow who so muddled my brains by talking of our first parents and apples and serpents and cherubims and paradises that really I was within an ace of believing nothing at all; in fact, I didn't believe anything at all, hang me if I did. But now I am ready to go to the stake for religion's sake. It isn't that I see the sense of it; on the contrary, I see less sense than ever. But still I would go to the stake for it without knowing why, and that is all I can tell you."

"So much the better, monseigneur," said the father in a tone slightly nasal, but very devout, "so much the better. This is not the doing of man, but of God. 'I see no sense in it.' That is true religion, that is. 'No sense in it!' How gracious Providence has been to you, monseigneur. We are told to be as little children. Children are innocent; and why? because they have not got any sense. 'Blessed

[1] It may be just necessary to remind the reader that *philosophie* already had acquired the meaning (which in the next century became famous) of scepticism in religious matters.

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are the poor in spirit, for they do not sin.' Why? Because they have no reason. 'I don't see any sense in it.' 'I can't tell you why.' 'I don't know why.' What beautiful words! They ought to be written in letters of gold. 'It is not that I see any sense in it; on the contrary, less than ever.' Certainly this is the work of heaven, for those at least who know how to appreciate heavenly things. 'No sense in it.' How gracious Providence has been to you!"

SAINT-EVREMOND.

It is possible that the father would have pushed his holy detestation of sense and reason still farther, but at this moment letters were brought to the marshal from the Court, which put an end to the edifying discourse. The marshal read his letters to himself, and when he had done so he was good enough to communicate their contents to the company. "If I wished to play the politician," said he, "like some people, I should go into my study to read my dispatches, but I always act and speak openly. The cardinal tells me that Stenay is taken, that the Court will be here in a week, and that I am to have the command of the besieging army to go and relieve Arras with Turenne and La Ferté. I have not forgotten that Turenne let M. le Prince beat me when the Court was at Gien; perhaps I shall have a chance of paying him back in the same coin. If Arras could be relieved and Turenne beaten it would exactly suit me. I'll do my best towards it, and I say no more." He would doubtless have told us all the circumstances of his battle and his grievance against Turenne, but news was brought that the convoy was already at some distance from the town, so that we had to take leave somewhat earlier than we should otherwise have done.

Father Canaye, who had no mount, asked for one to take him to the camp. "And what sort of a horse would you like?" said the marshal.

"I shall answer you, monseigneur, as the good Father Suarez answered the Duke of Medina Sidonia in like case, '*Qualem me decet esse; mansuetum.*' A gentle and peaceable beast, such as I ought to be myself."

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"I know something of your Latin," said the marshal. "*Mansuetum!* That would suit a sheep better than a horse. Give my own horse to the SAINT-father; I love his order and himself. Give EVREMOND. him my good horse."

I dispatched my business, and shortly rejoined the convoy. We got safely through, but not without some fatigue to Father Canaye. I met him during the march on M. d'Hocquincourt's good horse—a lively beast, never still, always champing his bit, shying and neighing after every horse he met, to the father's great dismay. "Why, father," said I, as I came up to him, "is that a mount in the style of Suarez?"

"Ah, sir," he began, "I am quite worn out; I can't stand it any longer." But at that moment we put up a hare. At once a hundred horsemen left the ranks to gallop after her, and there were pistol-shots fired enough for a respectable skirmish. The father's horse, well accustomed to fire, ran away with him, and made him in a minute outstrip all the hunters. It was pleasant to see a Jesuit showing the way to the field without the least intention of doing so. Luckily the hare was soon killed, and I found the father in the midst of a score of troopers, who were congratulating him on being in at the death, after a run which really might be called a providential interposition.

He received their politeness with a good grace, and in his heart he began quite to despise Suarez' *mansuetum caballum*, and thought not a little of himself for the excellent figure he flattered himself he had cut upon the marshal's thoroughbred. But he soon had occasion to remember that fine saying of Solomon, *Vanitas vanitatum, omnia vanitas.* As he grew cool he felt a pain to which excitement had hitherto rendered him insensible, and vainglory giving place to real anguish, he regretted the repose of his society and the sweets of the peaceful life he had quitted. But his meditations were useless. The camp had to be reached, and he was so tired of his steed that I could see he was quite ready to leave Bucephalus to his own devices, and head the infantry on foot.

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SAINT-EVREMOND.

I consoled him for his woes, and partly cured them by giving him the most easy-going animal that he could possibly have desired. He thanked me a thousand times, and was so sensible of my courtesy that, forgetting his cloth, he talked to me more like a frank and open-hearted man than a wary Jesuit. I asked him what he thought of M. d'Hocquincourt. "He is an excellent gentleman," he said; "indeed, a precious soul. He has left the Jansenists, and we are much obliged to him; but, for my part, I shall not sit next him again at table, and I shall never borrow another horse of him." Satisfied with this first confidence, I thought I would try to draw him out further. "What," said I, "is the origin of the terrible enmity between you and the Jansenists? Is it really due to a difference of opinions about grace?" "That would be absurd," he answered. "It is folly to think that our mutual hatred is due to divergence of opinion on such a point. Neither grace nor the Five Propositions have really set us by the ears. It is all due to rivalry in the direction of consciences. The Jansenists found us in possession of the confessional, and wished to drive us out. To do so they adopted a plan of action diametrically opposite to ours. We use gentleness and indulgence, they affect austerity and rigour. We soothe souls by pointing out God's mercy, they startle them by dwelling on His justice. They apply fear while we use hope, and try to subdue where we try to attract. We both of us wish to save souls, but each wishes to have the credit of the process; and, to be plain with you, the interests of the director generally take precedence of the salvation of the penitent. I am speaking to you in a way very different from that in which I spoke to the marshal. With him I was simply the Jesuit, with you I use the openness of a soldier."

I complimented him very much on the changed sentiments with which his new profession had inspired him, and he appeared to like the compliment. I might have gone on longer, but as night approached we had to part, the father apparently as much pleased with me as I was amused at him.

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I am much mistaken if the modernness of this does not strike most readers in a work which dates from 1656. Of the same year, and almost more surprising, is the following charming argument on the question "Whether a Catholic or a Protestant makes the best wife?":— SAINT-EVREMOND.

You tell me that you are in love with a girl who is a Protestant, and that, were it not for the difference of religion, you think you could make up your mind to marry her. If you are so minded that you cannot bear the idea of being separated from your wife in the next world, I should advise you to marry a Catholic. But if I were a marrying man, I think I should prefer a lady of a religion different to mine. I should be afraid that a Catholic, being sure of her husband's society in the next life, might, perhaps, take a fancy to the society of a lover in this. I have an idea, too, which is not a common one, but in the truth of which I am disposed to believe. It is that the reformed religion is as favourable to husbands as the Catholic faith is advantageous to lovers. The Christian liberty of which Protestants boast tends to form a certain spirit of resistance, which helps women to defend themselves from the insidious approaches of a gallant. On the other hand, the submission which Catholicity demands predisposes them to allow themselves to be conquered. And, indeed, a soul which can resign itself under persuasion to what is unpleasant ought not to make much difficulty in yielding to what is delightful. The reformed religion seeks only to establish regularity of conduct, and regularity easily becomes virtue. Catholicism makes women much more devout, and devotion easily becomes love. The one, again, teaches only abstinence from what is forbidden. The other, which admits the virtue of good works, allows its votaries to commit some trifling acts from which they are told to abstain, at the price of doing a good deal of good which they are not strictly enjoined to

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perform. Protestant chapels, moreover, are a great safeguard to husbands, while Catholic churches are the reverse. There are objects in our sacred buildings which only too often inspire amorous sentiments. In a picture of the Magdalen, old ladies may take her repentance as expressing the austerity of her life; young ones will take it for a trance of swooning passion; and while the former may think chiefly of the saint, the latter are likely to find considerable matter for meditation in the history of the sinner. . . .

SAINT-EVREMOND.

"I shall be safe then," you will say, "if I marry a Protestant." I shall answer in the words of the excellent Father Hippothadée to Panurge, "Yes, if it please God." A wise man leaves this matter to Providence, expecting from it safety, and from himself, in any case, equanimity.

For a third and still shorter example we may take the portrait of the Duke de Candale. It will, I think, bear comparison even with the best of such things, of which it is hardly necessary to say the century produced, both in France and England, masterpieces that have never been surpassed or equalled :—

As M. de Candale made a sufficient figure in the world to leave behind some curiosity as to his character, it may not be amiss to give a regular description of it. I have known few people who had so many discordant characteristics. But he had one great advantage in his intercourse with other men. Nature had prominently exposed all his amiable traits, and had hidden those which might have proved repulsive in the recesses of his heart. I never saw a mien more impressive than his. All his personal characteristics were amiable, and he made the most of parts which were of no extraordinary merit, so as to be an agreeable companion. A slight acquaintance produced a liking for him. A thorough intimacy could not be long kept up without exciting disgust, since he was little careful to preserve

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your friendship, and very capricious in the display of his own.

As he was thus careless of his friends, men of sense effected their retreat from his society without making any outcry, and reduced the connection to mere acquaintanceship: but sentimental persons would often complain of him as of a faithless mistress, from whom they could not tear themselves. Thus his personal charms kept him up in spite of his defects, and found a lingering tenderness even in justly irritated souls. For his own part, he lived with his friends as ladies are wont to do with their lovers. Whatever service you might have done him, he ceased to like you when you ceased to please, being easily sated with a long-standing intimacy, and as fully alive to the charms of a new friendship as are the other sex to the exquisite tenderness of a dawning passion. For all this he would let his old ties stand without attempting to break them; and he would have been a little annoyed at a violent rupture on your part, such a thing having a sort of roughness about it which did not suit his temper. Besides, he did not like to exclude the possibility of a *redintegratio amoris*, should you once more render yourself agreeable or useful to him. As he was a lover of pleasure and a man of business, keenly alive to his own interest, he came back to you for any amusement you could offer him, and would even seek you if you could do him a service. He was at once avaricious and prodigal; fond of the show which could be made by expense, but grudging the expense which was necessary for show. He was vain, yet not unaccommodating; selfish, yet not treacherous; qualities which found themselves strangely assorted in the same person. It would have been very disagreeable to him to deceive you, and when his interest (which was the usual guide of his actions) made him break his word, he was ashamed of having broken it, and dissatisfied with himself until you had forgotten his offence. Then his affection for you rekindled, and he felt a secret obligation to you for having set him at ease with himself. Unless it was his interest to do so he rarely disobliged you, but

SAINT-EVREMOND.

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you received as little good from his friendship as harm from his enmity; and between friends it is, perhaps, a subject of complaint to be obliged only for the evil which has not been done.

SAINT-EVREMOND.

There are some points in this to which, I think, Swift was not unindebted in the most famous specimen of this kind of literature that we have in English—the character of Wharton. But it still more closely resembles in germ a weighty and most melancholy remark of Hobbes, for whom, as was natural, Saint-Evremond had a great admiration. "For the most part," says the sage of Malmesbury, in words which ought to be written in letters of iron over the door of any temple of Friendship or of Love, "they have much better fortune in love whose hopes are built upon something in their person than those that trust to their expressions and service; and they that care less than they that care more; which not perceiving, many men cast away their services as one arrow after another, till in the end, together with their hopes, they lose their wits." If we may trust Saint-Evremond, the Duke de Candale's friends, of whom the satirist himself was one, must have had occasion to meditate upon this.

One more extract of a very different kind will show the practical side of Saint-Evremond's epicureanism. He had, before his exile, a great reputation both as gourmand and gourmet, and belonged to a sort of informal society called "Les Côteaux," from their curious judgment in vintages.

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His friend, the Count d'Olonne (husband of a still greater friend), had fallen into one of those disgraces which were so frequent at the French court, and had had to retire to his estates. Saint-Evremond, an experienced exile, writes him a consolation. He begins by recommending books, especially Lucian, Petronius (for whom he had a somewhat disproportionate but easily explicable admiration), and *Don Quixote*, and then he passes to the root of the matter. It is only fair to premise, as a reminder, that Dom Pérignon had not yet made the wines of Champagne effervesce, and that the heresy (a most undoubted heresy) as to Burgundy was afterwards recanted :— SAINT-EVREMOND.

Adjust, as far as you can, your tastes to your health. It is a great secret to know how to marry the agreeable to the necessary in a matter where they are generally opposed. To attain this great secret, however, nothing is necessary but temperance and nicety. And what trouble ought one to grudge in order to learn how to eat delightfully at meals —a thing which keeps body and mind in good order for all our other hours? A man may be temperate without being nice, but he cannot be nice without being temperate. Happy he who has both qualifications, for then his diet and his desires agree.

Spare no trouble to provide yourself with champagne, were you two hundred leagues from Paris. Burgundy has lost all its credit with people of taste, and even the dealers only succeed in keeping up a remnant of its old reputation. No province gives us such excellent wines for all seasons as Champagne, which supplies Ay, Avenay, and Haut Villiers till spring, and Tessy, Sillery, and Verzenay for the rest of the year. If you ask me which I like best of

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all wines, without attending to fashion, I shall tell you that Ay is the most natural of all—the wholesomest, the most free from earthy taste, the most delicate, in virtue of its peculiar peach flavour, and to my fancy the first of wines. Leo X., Charles V., François I., and Henry VIII. used each to keep a house at or near Ay, in order to make up their stocks of it more carefully, and amid all the weighty affairs which these great princes had to supply themselves with, Ay was not the least of their cares.

SAINT-EVREMOND.

Do not be curious in out-of-the-way meats, but prefer those which are easily procured. A very simple broth, neither too much nor too little done, should form the basis of every meal, as well for the cleanness of its taste as for its supporting qualities. Tender, juicy mutton, well-fed veal, white and delicate poultry, which has been fed but not crammed, fresh-caught quails, pheasants, partridges, rabbits, each with its proper flavour, are the meats which, season by season, should furnish your table. The moor-hen is excellent and to be well spoken of, but too rare where you are and where I am to be recommended. If an indispensable necessity makes you dine with some of your neighbours who have escaped the conscription by money or good luck, compliment them on their hares, their venison, and their wild boar, but be careful not to touch either, and let the same rule guide you as to ducks, and, I had almost said, teal. Of all brown meats let the snipe alone be saved by its flavour, though at some small cost to health.

Regard all cook's mixtures, such as ragoûts and hors d'œuvres, as a variety of poison. If you eat a little of them, they will do you only a little harm; if you eat much, the pepper, the vinegar, and the onions will surely spoil your taste, and in the end affect your health. Simple condiments which you apply yourself can do no harm. Salt and orange-juice are the best and most natural seasonings. Mixed herbs are more wholesome and better flavoured than spices, but they are not universally applicable. They must be employed with discernment, and so adjusted that they

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bring out the proper taste of the food without making their own flavour evident.

SAINT-EVREMOND.

These practical and minute instructions, which perhaps contain as sound a theory of cookery as has ever been put on paper, are completed by some equally practical hints on "the rule of not too much," by some remarks on *ce qui regarde l'amour*, and even by some counsels on religious matters, so that M. d'Olonne had the whole duty of man put before him in a letter of some half-score pages. Perhaps parts of this letter might seem undignified to transcendental persons; but one may venture a guess that Saint-Evremond's attention to these matters had not a little to do with his ninety-three years.

In making these translations I have thought it well to show chiefly the lighter side of Saint-Evremond's style and talents. But for this there are some other pieces which would perhaps have given a higher if not a truer idea of him. Such are, for instance, his admirable *Thoughts on French Tragedies*, a piece of criticism which for a contemporary of Boileau is altogether astonishing in the justness of its sentiments and principles. The same may be said of his strictures on the French historians of his time, and of his observations on Italian Opera, which contain the substance, and are probably the source, of all that Addison and Chesterfield—the latter our English Saint-Evremond—with many others since their time, have said about that singular growth. I do not

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hesitate to place these three pieces of criticism above anything of the kind which was written before the middle of the eighteenth century; while the views which they express hardly obtained general currency till the beginning of the nineteenth. Saint-Evremond is the best exponent of *goût* that I know. His fastidious liking for delicacy and refinement might have been thought to predispose him towards an unhesitating adoption of the extreme academic system of French criticism, with its rigid adherence to rule, its *doucereuse* tragedy, and its comedy formed on a plan for which even Molière was too lawless and farcical. Yet the native literary sense of the man, and his early associations with writers of the vigorous stamp of Théophile and Saint-Amand, kept him clear of these errors. His admiration of Corneille is as hearty, and at the same time as discerning, as admiration can well be, and towards Molière, though he is less enthusiastic, he is equally clear-sighted. But it is obvious that, while admitting his great merits, he could not like Racine. He had a great admiration for Ben Jonson, which, however, he probably took at second-hand from Waller, for his knowledge of English does not seem to have been quite equal to the appreciation of such intensely idiomatic work as *Bartholomew Fair* and *The Silent Woman*. In his judgments of ancient literature he is, like most men of his century, better worth listening to on Latin authors

SAINT-EVREMOND.

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than on Greek. He has in especial some uncomplimentary remarks on Lucian, which are rather incomprehensible. But his comments on Virgil are not to be slighted, though they will scarcely satisfy the most ardent admirers of the Mantuan. Saint-Evremond, like other people since his time, evidently had some difficulty in refraining from looking at Virgil as at an Augustan *doucereux*. I may conclude these observations on his literary studies by noticing a very curious piece of verbal criticism on the word *vaste*. Saint-Evremond, whose taste in language was unerring, very properly objected to the use of this term as a mere synonym for "great," and pointed out that its connotation includes the idea of desolation, wildness, or sterility, thus making the phrase *esprit vaste* by no means an unmixed compliment. His friend the Abbé and historian, Saint-Réal, submitted this point to the Academy, and received from that courtly body, as might have been expected, an opinion adverse to that of the man on whom the sun of Marly was not shining. The dissertation in question is a half-satirical, half-serious rejoinder. It contains some very acute literary argument, followed by a historical survey of the persons to whom the term *esprit vaste* might be applied. Finally, there comes (at least in the first draft, for Saint-Evremond cancelled it later) the following characteristic attack :—

SAINT-EVREMOND.

Come, gentlemen, would you yourselves have laboured

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for some forty years upon the exclusion of some dozen words from our language, were it not for the just aversion you have conceived to the *esprit vaste*? Your best-famed members have grown old on the strength of translations, judiciously making it their business to submit their judgment to that of others. Could anything be more opposed to the *esprit vaste*? Would you give vent to your genius in its full force, you might have produced historians worthy of the greatness of our State. But, gentlemen, you content yourselves with publishing some neatly turned story or some polished nouvelle. You evidently take all possible precautions against the danger of the *vaste*. Some of you dutifully imitate Horace; others are good enough to give us Greek and Roman works, done to suit the modern taste; no one gives the reins to his fancy. No doubt this is from fear of the *vaste*, wherein the just precision of your rules might run a risk of being neglected.

SAINT-EVREMOND.

I am not, therefore, disturbed, gentlemen, at the judgment you have delivered. Your writings contradict your words, and your works, everlasting protests against the *vaste*, quash your decision. In fact, all that you do is so admirably characteristic of *l'esprit borné*, that no man of sense can think you sincere in your approval of *l'esprit vaste*.

This passage, which concluded with a still more unkind though perfectly just hit at Racine and Boileau by name, Saint-Evremond changed into the following, which expresses more politely but perhaps even more pointedly its essence:—

Si je ne me suis pas soumis au jugement que vous avez donné, c'est que j'ai trouvé dans vos écrits une censure du vaste beaucoup plus fort que celle qu'on verra dans ce discours. En effet, messieurs, vous avez donné des bornes si justes à vos esprits, que vous semblez condamner vous-mêmes le mot que vous défendez.

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Great as was Saint-Evremond's reputation as a critic, his social and philosophical reputation was perhaps greater. Much of his written work is intimately connected with his attitude towards society. The earliest of all, or almost the earliest, consists of some maxims of the selfish-moralist kind, treated with less conciseness and literary brilliancy than those of La Rochefoucauld, but not altogether dissimilar in sentiment. The portrait of the Duke de Candale which I have given, and some other writings of his middle life, have also a certain tinge of unamiable hardness. But after his exile his tone is generally softer. His love-letters, of which we have a fair selection, are very perfect of their kind. Those to the chief divinity of his manhood, the beautiful and hare-brained Countess d'Olonne, have a tone of bitterness about them which is sometimes almost Catullian. The correspondence with Ninon de Lenclos is mostly of a date when both the modern Epicurus and the modern Leontium (the latter name is his own) were far advanced in years. But that with Hortense Mancini is a model in its kind, and is perhaps the only instance of an old man making love on paper to a young woman, without at the same time making himself ridiculous. The *Portrait de Madame Mazarin* is altogether rapturous, though in nothing of Saint-Evremond's is his observance of due measure more evident. The letters show him alternately coaxing and scolding

SAINT-EVREMOND.

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the duchess out of her numerous intended follies, looking after the parrot "Pretty" and the cat "Poussy" (which, on Mr. Lewis Carroll's principles, may be a compound of pussy and *poussif*, the latter not a bad name for a spoilt tabby), arranging excursions, organising dinners, and so forth. For a septuagenarian not to be fatuous under such circumstances is surely hard enough. But Saint-Evremond is never fatuous, and the rare occasions on which he is tempted to murmur "Si vieillesse pouvait" save him from the charge of frivolity, without bringing upon him any counter-charge of unmanly melancholy.

SAINT-EVREMOND.

He was commonly called by his friends, especially Créqui and Grammont, *Le Philosophe*, and the appellation may suggest to any modern Plutarch of literature a pleasant parallel between the two men to whom in two following centuries it served as sobriquet. Our present subject had perhaps hardly as much right to the title as Diderot, yet it was not a misnomer in his case, nor was its application limited to the special sense which, as the *Conversation du Père Canaye* will have shown, *philosophe* had already acquired. His professedly serious work, beyond the domain of literary judgment, is not large. But what there is of it, historic or moralising, is so deeply tinged with a definite and practical system of life-philosophy that the dye cannot escape notice. A sentence in one of his earliest writings strikes the key-note of this philosophy, which he

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professed to have learnt from Gassendi, but in reality seems to have formed pretty much for himself. "Fame, riches, love, and pleasure, well understood and well managed, are of great assistance in mitigating the rigour of nature and softening the miseries incidental to life. Thus wisdom has been given to us chiefly for the government of our pleasures." SAINT-EVREMOND.

To this principle he was faithful throughout his life, and the application of it threw a moralising, some would say a demoralising, cast over the attitude with which he regarded things in general. This indeed was common enough in the seventeenth century, and if men were then as likely to act merely on impulse as they are now, there was a much greater tendency to endeavour to reduce actions to some common principle. In no one was this tendency more marked than in Saint-Evremond. His own principle may have been a narrow or an erroneous one. But he carried it out persistently with regard to his own affairs, and was anxious that his friends should apply it to theirs. His philosophy was not unlike that of a bird which makes its nest of all materials that can be laid hold of and made to serve. He never gave himself trouble about anything not likely to conduce to the living of a tolerably pleasant and honourable life; and he carefully avoided the doing of anything which might prove unpleasant or dishonourable. This perpetual study of probabilities and

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consequences conferred upon him, in many ways, an extraordinary long-sightedness, and there are probably few writers in whose practical judgments, if we put arbitrary prejudices aside, more wisdom is to be found. It is no wonder, therefore, that he should have hit the taste of a time which before all things preferred philosophising of a more or less practical kind, and which in Hobbes, Descartes, Malebranche, Locke, Spinoza, and Leibnitz produced a group of philosophic writers such as has never been at any time surpassed. Nor must it be forgotten that the form of Saint-Evremond's writings, little as it has conduced to their ultimate fame, was singularly calculated to give them vogue. Their great literary excellence, at a time when literary excellence was first beginning to be recognised, and their adoption of the fashionable forms of the time, could not fail of this result, while on the other hand both fairly entitle their author to an important place in the history of literature. In two things at least Saint-Evremond had no superior in his day, and he may be thought even to have had some claim to originality in both. The first was the application to serious and practical subjects of the ironic method; the second was the use of this method in fashioning light essays conveying important conclusions. In the first he serves as a link between Pascal and Voltaire; in the latter as a link of perhaps still more importance between Montaigne and Addison.

SAINT-EVREMOND.

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Saint-Evremond's portrait drawn by himself may not improperly help to conclude this paper. It is flattering, but hardly flattered, if we may judge both from the work he has left and from the testimony of others :— SAINT-EVREMOND.

He is a philosopher who keeps aloof alike from superstition and from impiety; an epicurean, whose distaste for debauchery is as strong as his appetite for pleasure; a man who has never known want, but at the same time has never enjoyed affluence. He lives in a manner which is despised by those who have everything, envied by those who have nothing, appreciated by those who make their happiness and their reason agree. In his youth he hated waste, being persuaded that property was necessary to make a long life comfortable. In his age he cares not for economy, feeling that want is little to be feared when one has but a little time left to want in. He is grateful for the gifts of nature, and finds no fault with those of fortune; he hates crime, endures error, and pities misfortune. He does not try to find out the bad points of men in order to decry them, but he looks for their foibles in order to give himself amusement; is secretly rejoiced at the knowledge of these foibles, and would be still more pleased to make them known to others, did not his discretion forbid. Life is to his mind too short to read all sorts of books, and to load one's memory with all sorts of things at the risk of one's judgment. He devotes himself not to the most learned writings, so as to acquire knowledge, but to the most sensible, so as to strengthen his understanding. At one time he seeks the most elegant to refine his taste, at another the most amusing to refresh his spirits. As for friendship, he has more constancy than might be expected from a philosopher, and more heartiness than could be looked for even in a younger and less experienced man. As for religion, he thinks justice, charity, and trust in the goodness of God of more importance than sorrow for past offences.

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SAINT-EVREMOND.

In this and other utterances of Saint-Evremond's we have the whole philosophy of the *Essay on Man*, and much of that contained in other writings as dissimilar to one another as those of Temple and Addison, Shaftesbury and Steele. Nor is this at all surprising, for in England the influence which Saint-Evremond exerted was far from being merely a social influence. In passage after passage of the great Queen Anne writers, his teaching and style are discernible. *The Conduct of the Allies* shows in point of style and flavour distinct reminiscences of the *Lettre sur la Paix des Pyrénées*. His characters and portraits foreshadow more clearly than any contemporary writings the great essayists of the decade immediately succeeding his death; and his philosophy, religious and practical, was the direct and immediate ancestor of the religious and practical philosophy of Bolingbroke and Chesterfield.

It will hardly do, no doubt, to judge him from the point of view of a strict or ascetic morality. His *epistola dehortatoria* to Louise de Querouaille,[1] imploring her to pause before rejecting the advances of Charles II., and thereby subjecting herself to the chances of a lifetime of futile regret, is one of the oddest topsyturvifications of noble sentiment to be anywhere found. It might be bound up as a companion to *The Court of Love*, to Carew's *Rapture*, and to the famous passage in

[1] Or Kéroualle as we are now told to call her.

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Aucassin et Nicolette. But Ninon's friend and Gassendi's disciple could hardly be expected to be a votary of the cult of sorrow and self-denial. As a man, his chief claim to respect is, that he fully appreciated and obeyed the maxim in which M. Leconte de Lisle has embodied the philosophy of life :— SAINT-EVREMOND.

> Le faible souffre et pleure, et l'insensé s'irrite,
> Mais le plus sage en rit, sachant qu'il doit mourir.

If Saint-Evremond had no great troubles to undergo, he had troubles which to many men of his time appeared crushing enough. He was never rich, he made no great figure in the world, and he fell under that displeasure of kings which, for the second time in history, seems to have had the singular faculty of crushing and paralysing the spirit even of men of no small merit and powers. As an exile from France and an outcast from the sunbeams of Louis's favour, Saint-Evremond permitted himself no abject entreaties or base compliances. He remained like Rotrou's saintly hero, "debout et dans son rang." As a figure in literary history he is of great importance. He produced no work of magnitude, and even of his numerous small achievements only a few letters and essays possess intrinsic merit of a very high class ; but he had the great merit of being original. In him we hear the first note of the tones which were to dominate French literature for a hundred and fifty years. He displays a combination of solid sense and cultivated taste with refined

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badinage and a certain independence of thought which is hardly to be met in French before him, and which, if often missed since, has at any rate been constantly aimed at. Voltaire was undoubtedly his scholar, and all the lesser lights of the eighteenth century have to acknowledge the same obligation at first or second hand. There were doubtless many things that he could not and did not do, but with these, according to the view which I venture to take of literary criticism, it is not necessary to concern ourselves. It is sufficient that what he did do is remarkable, that imitation of it has produced a large amount of literary work of high excellence, and that it stands in definite and sufficient contrast of style and manner to the work of other literary persons and periods. The list of writers of whose work as much may be said is far from being extensive, and in that list Saint-Evremond undoubtedly deserves a place of more distinction than has usually been accorded to him.

SAINT-EVREMOND.

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VII

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE[1]

"Ce Baudelaire est une pierre de touche ; il déplait invariablement à tous les imbéciles."

THE above remark is said to have been made (probably with reference rather to the future poet's manner and conversation than to his published works, which were then neither many nor important) when Baudelaire was still a very young man. But the saying still has some force, even though it be illegitimate to

[1] In the seventeen years which have passed since this essay was written, a little though not very much has been added to our knowledge of Baudelaire. The *Œuvres Posthumes* edited in 1887 by his friend M. Crepet (the editor-publisher of a well-known anthology of French poetry, which is perhaps the best thing of the kind ever done) contained nothing of great importance, but threw further light on his personal character, and gave some fresh writings, with certain additions of biographical information. Specimens of some letters, announced for publication in greater mass, have also recently been printed in a magazine, *Le Livre Moderne*. As to personality, what every intelligent student of human nature had long seen, that Baudelaire's "Satanic" attitudes were mainly if not merely pose, may be said to have been conclusively shown by these recent additions. As to the more important point of the character and

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infer from it that everybody who does not like Baudelaire is a fool. It is the purpose of the present article to discuss, somewhat more in detail than has yet [1875] been done before an English audience, the claims and peculiarities of one whom the writer regards as the most original, and within his limits the most remarkable, of modern French poets.

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

There can be no doubt (the remark is not offered as a new one) that no greater misfortune can happen to an author than that he should be ticketed as the exponent of eccentric or unpopular views. When once a name passes into the category of symbols, it is useless to expect careful and candid appreciation of its owner's works, except in the case of a very few persons of exceptionally critical habits or powers. It becomes

influence of his work, I may claim to have been on the winning hand throughout, from days when it appeared to be the losing. Hostile criticism could do no more than was done in M. Scherer's repeated attacks on Baudelaire, and this utmost was useless. It is now admitted in France by critics of principles and tastes most opposed to his own, not merely that Baudelaire has had an influence literally second to none on French poetry since his day, but that after allowing for every drawback in matter and form, no writer of verse equal to him in intense and original poetic quality has appeared in his own country during the second half of the nineteenth century, and hardly any whose thought and expression are so exactly and happily married. I myself never contended for anything more, and shall never be satisfied with anything less. I have been in two minds whether to extend this essay considerably or to leave it, with certain necessary alterations, pretty much as it first appeared. The latter finally seemed the better plan. But I must admit that the epigraph of the paper is no longer absolutely true. *Les imbéciles* also have begun to admire Baudelaire. [1892.]

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a matter of course that people of one turn of thinking should use the unlucky type as a sort of spiritual target to be shot at, and if possible hit, according to the measure of their temper and skill. And it becomes generally a matter of course that people, especially young people, of another turn of thinking, should regard the said type with ready-made and indiscriminate admiration, which is perhaps more really harmful to their own critical faculty, and to the reputation of their idol, than the equally ready-made and indiscriminate abuse of others.

However obvious these remarks may be, their appropriateness to the subject of the present article will hardly be denied. Scarcely any author can be mentioned who has suffered more from this sort of random abuse than Charles Baudelaire. Before 1866 probably not one educated Englishman in twenty had even heard of him; but his name was dragged in pretty freely in the controversy which arose about Mr. Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads*, and from that day to this the unfortunate author of *Fleurs du Mal* has served to point any number of cheap morals, forged by people who most likely never opened a page of his writings. Misapprehension, not to say misrepresentation, is particularly easy in such a case. Modern French literature, excepting certain novels, is, it may be suspected, not particularly familiar to the average Englishman; and, of all departments of French literature, modern French poetry is

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probably least known to him.[1] It is the rarest thing in the world to find an Englishman who is not convinced in his heart of hearts that French poetry is something very like a contradiction in terms; and it would, I should say, be easy to find not a few men of letters who, willing as they may be to pay a certain glib compliment to the names of even Victor Hugo and Alfred de Musset, would be sorely puzzled to hit a quotation from *Les Chants du Crépuscule* or *Namouna*. If this be the case with well-known names, how much more with the lesser stars? And yet there is perhaps no French poet more deserving of appreciation in England, certainly there is none whose poetical qualities are so germane to those which we should chiefly affect and reverence on this side of the Channel, as Charles Baudelaire. Of the poet's life it cannot be necessary to say very much. In the notices of Baudelaire by Théophile Gautier, by Charles Asselineau, and others, tolerably full details may be found by any one who cares to

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

[1] It may be objected that we have changed all this. Have we? I think the extraordinary hubbub which was raised not very many months ago over the discovery of M. Paul Verlaine is something of a proof to the contrary. There were even disputes as to priority of right in the said discovery, as of some new star. Now the fact was that M. Verlaine had been perfectly well known, to those who did know, since the early flourishing days of the *Parnasse Contemporain* and the *Renaissance*, that is to say, for nearly a quarter of a century. As for my next sentence, Mr. Lewis Morris, a month or two ago, made me feel that I had basely plagiarised him seventeen years beforehand by avowing the very sentiment referred to. [1892.]

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investigate a history which was not characterised by any remarkable events, except perhaps the melancholy end to which it came. Born in 1821, Baudelaire came in for the second phase of the Romantic movement, of which he was to be one of the most original ornaments. His whole life was, so to say, spent in Paris, the only breaks of importance being an early voyage to India, which was not without effects in colour on part of his works, and the final residence in Belgium, which lasted from the beginning of 1864, until he was brought back to Paris to die of general paralysis.

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

In general temperament the "farouche Baudelaire" (as his friend Théodore de Banville calls him in the *Odes Funambulesques*) appears to have been singularly typical of a certain class of men of letters, a class which perhaps does not produce the most widely known and appreciated work, and which suffers from excessive and possibly too conscious singularity, but which offers a peculiar attraction to the student and the critic, because it is itself as a rule studious and critical. Fastidiousness is in one word the note of this class, and its fastidiousness accounts at once for its comparative sterility, for the perfection of its work, and for its unpopularity. Generally speaking, extreme fastidiousness in a writer is felt as a kind of rebuke by the reader, who is probably conscious of no such great niceness in himself; and the world at large, if it is not altogether careless of quality,

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CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

has a certain predilection for quantity. The standard edition of the *Fleurs du Mal* contains but 270 pages of not very closely printed verse, and this (if we add the condemned pieces which amount to some 300 lines, and the poet's prose works, many of which it is true are written with as much care and elaboration as his verse, and which occupy three or four volumes more of about the same size) represents the result of nearly thirty years of constant work. The prose works, excluding the translation of Poe, consist almost entirely of critical writings, with the exception of the fourth and last volume. This contains a rather remarkable novelette, *La Fanfarlo*, of which we may have occasion to speak again, *Petits Poëmes en Prose*, which fall naturally under the head of the poetical writings, and *Les Paradis Artificiels*, which is partly original and partly translated or adapted from De Quincey. The genius of the latter writer appears to have had an attraction for Baudelaire nearly equal to that exercised by Edgar Poe, with whom indeed De Quincey, on one of the many sides of his mind, had not a little sympathy. Many of the *Suspiria* are extremely Poësque, indeed, "Our Ladies of Sorrow," which Baudelaire has translated as only he could translate, completely beats Poe on his own ground. Both authors fall far short of Baudelaire himself as regards depth and fulness of passion, but both have a superficial likeness to him in eccentricity of temperament, and in affection

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for a certain peculiar mixture of grotesque and horror. But *Les Paradis Artificiels* is chiefly valuable as illustrating well the reason of Baudelaire's affection for this mixture, which has been entirely misconstrued. Wine, haschisch, opium, are interesting to him just as the passion of Delphine is interesting, not at all from a diseased craving for stimulus, still less from the perverse desire which a writer who should have known him better has attributed to him, of "finding beauty in recondite wickedness," but simply as some of the different means to which men and women have been driven in the endeavour to reach the infinite, and avoid the monster which dogs them—Ennui. Any one who has ever taken the trouble to read the "Au Lecteur" of the *Fleurs du Mal* must feel at once this very note, which is there struck with no uncertain sound. The four volumes of Baudelaire's works might be fairly entitled *De l'Ennui*, for all that they contain is really but an anatomy of this ergotism of the modern spirit under its various forms, with the evasions and prophylactics which its victims have sought or obtained. Perhaps the clearest understanding of Baudelaire's general views may be obtained by comparing the above-mentioned "Au Lecteur" with the two following pieces, the first of which is from the later *Fleurs du Mal*, the last one of the *Poëmes en Prose*.

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LA RANÇON

L'homme a pour payer sa rançon
Deux champs au tuf profond et riche,
Qu'il faut qu'il remue et défriche
Avec le fer de la raison ;

Pour obtenir la moindre rose,
Pour extorquer quelques épis,
Des pleurs salis de son front gris
Sans cesse il faut qu'il les arrose.

L'un est l'Art et l'autre l'Amour.
—Pour rendre le juge propice,
Lorsque de la stricte justice
Paraîtra le terrible jour,

Il faudra lui montrer des granges
Pleines de moissons, et des fleurs
Dont les formes et les couleurs
Gagnent le suffrage des Anges.

ENIVREZ-VOUS

Il faut être toujours ivre. Tout est là : c'est l'unique question. Pour ne pas sentir l'horrible fardeau du Temps qui brise vos épaules et vous penche vers la terre il faut vous enivrer sans trêve.

Mais de quoi ? De vin, de poésie, ou de vertu, à votre guise. Mais enivrez-vous.

Et si quelquefois, sur les marches d'un palais, sur l'herbe verte d'un fossé, dans la solitude morne de votre chambre, vous vous réveillez, l'ivresse déjà diminuée ou disparue, demandez au vent, à la vague, à l'étoile, à l'oiseau, à l'horloge, à tout ce qui fuit, à tout ce qui gémit, à tout ce qui roule, à tout ce qui chante, à tout ce qui parle, demandez quelle heure il est ; et le vent, la vague, l'étoile, l'oiseau, l'horloge vous répondront, " Il est l'heure de s'enivrer ! Pour n'être pas les esclaves martyrisés du Temps, enivrez-vous :

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enivrez-vous sans cesse! De vin, de poésie, ou de vertu, à votre guise."

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

With illustrations of the intoxication of virtue, our poet, I must confess, has not greatly troubled himself; perhaps he felt no call to such a work, perhaps he regarded it as a mere branch of archæology; but I must again repeat that if he has illustrated virtue as virtue but little, he has still less illustrated vice as vice. His amatory studies, like his studies on opium and haschisch, are illustrations of the "ivresse de vin," of the tendency to resort to any stimulant if only it be strong or strange. Such studies are moreover legitimate as forming part of his own "ivresse de poésie," of his labours in tilling the field of art which he has chosen as the means of paying his ransom to Time.

In the same way also, we see the reason and justification, according to this general plan of work and life, of the critical studies which form so large a part of his written productions. It is not possible for any one in the highest branch of art, literature, to maintain a continuous production of created or independent matter of the highest kind. Criticism therefore becomes as much a necessity as it is a pleasure, not to mention for the moment the natural bent of that phase of culture which Baudelaire represents towards critical and reflective action. Of the two volumes of criticism which have been published under Baudelaire's name, the first, *Curiosités Esthétiques* (a title which is his

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CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

own, though not actually used by him), is exclusively occupied with the arts of design. The other, *L'Art Romantique*, is more catholic in its comprehension. It includes not merely pictorial and literary but also musical subjects, and of it, the somewhat famous pamphlet on Wagner's *Tannhäuser* forms part. The characteristics of Baudelaire's picture-criticism are not difficult to discover and describe. It is singularly fluent and pleasant to read, possessing like all his works excellent literary qualities. But on this point it does not stand so very far removed from most French criticism. It has been understood in France ever since the time of Diderot's matchless *Salons*, that art-criticism must be the work not of a jargonist but of a humanist; and while such criticism has with us generally taken the form either of random comment, directed for the most part to the subject of the picture, or else of odious technicalities, the French have raised it to a not inconsiderable position among literary styles. Baudelaire not unfrequently reminds us of Diderot, and this is of itself high praise. But it is undeniable that his peculiar style of criticism shows its faults (and I cannot agree with Mr. Swinburne that it is faultless), more particularly when it is applied to painting. Baudelaire's criticism is not only intensely, but also narrowly and fragmentarily, subjective. With its subjectivity there is no fault to find. There can be nothing better for us, there can be nothing

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more true to the truth, than that a critic should simply tell us, in the best manner he can, the effect produced on his own mind by a given work of art. But he should at the same time take care to let his mind contemplate the object fully, so that the copy may fairly represent with due difference the phenomenon presented to it. Now Baudelaire is not quite free from the charge of occasionally, indeed not seldom, letting himself go off at a tangent, after very slight contact with a very small portion of the work he has before him. He observes too little and imagines too much, so that his criticism, though it is perhaps in itself more interesting than it would be easy to make it compatibly with faithful representation, is very often far from representing the complete effect of the subject on his own or any mind. In other words, to read a criticism of Baudelaire's without the title affixed, is by no means a sure method of recognising the picture afterwards.

Now as far as painting is concerned, this is without doubt a serious defect. Painting, with its combined attack of colour and form, produces, or ought to produce, a distinct, definite, and uniform effect on the beholder. It is not content with suggestions, it leaves little to the imagination. And it is surely an immutable rule that criticism should in such matters adjust itself to the peculiarities of the thing criticised. Hence it is that Baudelaire is far more successful as a critic when

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CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

he is dealing with literature and music; arts which, aiming at less minuteness of delineation, leave more to the recipient, and are therefore capable of vaguer and more manifold interpretation. It is natural that Baudelaire, who is nothing if not literary, should incline to this style of criticism, and a curious evidence of his unconscious thoroughness therein is his preference, a preference far more singular in his days than it is now, for etching. For it is in this point that etching differs from kindred arts of design, that it is far more literary and less pictorial; it aims, just as poetry does, rather at calling up in the mind of the beholder an effect similar to something in the mind of the artist, than at the elaborate representation of the artist's own idea. In the recognition of an aim of this sort, Baudelaire is unrivalled among critics; but he does not always escape the imminent danger of this sort of criticism, the danger of seeing in the picture or the poem all sorts of things which are not there, and are not even directly suggested by anything there, but come by a complicated process of association. A critic who should escape this danger while perfecting the style we speak of, who should develop fully but not add to the natural suggestiveness of his subject, and who should not be too hasty or too proud to observe and report as well as interpret, would perhaps be the blue dahlia of his class. It is sufficient praise to say of Baudelaire

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that his fault, if it be a fault, is only the result of excessive critical sensibility, and so is not far from being a virtue.

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

He has, moreover, the one merit which is, perhaps more than any other, the mark of the true critic. He judges much more by the form than by the matter of the work submitted to his notice. It is not necessary to indulge in any elaborate reasoning as to the intrinsic excellence of this mode of proceeding. I may content myself with taking a simple and matter-of-fact criterion as to the goodness of the two styles, namely the question "Which is likely to give us the best criticism?" Now it is hardly disputable that, in the case of criticism, the one thing needful (given a sufficient faculty and education) is the absence of prejudice. And it is still less disputable that it is far more difficult for a duly educated critic to err from prejudice, if he be accustomed to approach his subject from the side of form, than if he be wont to consider its matter first. There is a loyalty to art in the mind of every man competent to criticise at all which makes it impossible for him to call good work, as work, bad; or bad work, as work, good. On the other hand attractiveness of matter depends almost entirely on innumerable subtle influences of mood, circumstance, temperament, and habit, against which it is next to impossible to guard. Matter-criticism is particularly untrustworthy where trustworthiness is most to be desired, in

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the case of new or exceptional work or workers. Half the critical remarks which have been made for instance on Walt Whitman are vitiated by this defect. The critic has made up his mind that ultra-democratic views are admirable or damnable as the case may be, and all his criticism is tinged by this prepossession. Nor even in the case of less perilous stuff is there any surer way of going wrong than the direction of one's attention to the matter primarily. And against another great danger, the danger of indifference, the study of form is as good a safeguard as it is against the more obvious but not more real danger of prepossession. Many minds, when their possessors are neither very young nor very enthusiastic, come to the conclusion that one thing is as well worth saying or as well worth leaving unsaid as another thing. But no mind of any power or accomplishment can ever come to the conclusion that one manner of saying a thing is as good as another manner.

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

It must not be supposed that Baudelaire, because he has to the uttermost this artistic feeling, and as a rule conducts his works, both critical and original, in accordance with it, is unaware of the danger attending it, or of the ridicule which it is apt to bring upon any one who allows it to attain exorbitant dimensions. He is in fact remarkable among French authors (against whom it has become almost a commonplace to urge their

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insensibility to the ludicrous aspects of their particular hobbies and raptures) for the perfect sanity with which he looks at both sides of his own peculiarities, and ridicules himself unsparingly whenever he appears to deserve it, or to be lapsing into the theatrical. So rare is this sanity among the greater French writers, that M. Taine speaks of it quite innocently as a characteristic of the Teutonic race, and if anything rather a blemish. "Il se moque de ses émotions au moment même où il s'y livre," he says of Heine, and appears to regard this as a somewhat barbarous proceeding, excusable only in a savage who likes bitter ale and "humour." It is quite clear, however, that it is the only safeguard against extravagance and unreality, and that to its presence is owing the unalloyed pathos which distinguishes Heine himself from, let us say, Victor Hugo. This quality Baudelaire possessed in an eminent degree. Almost his first published work, the novelette *La Fanfarlo*, written when he was a very young man, is a satire, elaborate as far as it goes, and in parts very amusing, upon a personage who is none other than the future poet himself, partly as he actually was, and still more as not very acute readers choose to believe that he represented himself. It is curious to compare Samuel Cramer, the *dernier romantique*, who writes poems under the cheerful title of *Les Orfraies*, and at two o'clock in the morning insists on his mistress exchanging the usual dress or

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undress of that period for the rouge, tinsel, and spangles of the theatre, with the amusing but conventional heroes of Théophile Gautier's *Les Jeune-France*; and the comparison is instructive. It would show, if this were not superfluous, that the author of *Albertus* was only a skin-deep Romantic (being indeed of the class which transcends any special school), whereas the author of *La Fanfarlo* is perhaps the most typical figure in the whole Romantic cycle.

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

But this is not the only indication of Baudelaire's spirit of compensation. A very remarkable essay, "L'École Païenne," published in 1852, follows suit, and indeed contains better arguments against the author's supposed tendencies than a score of Societies for the Suppression of Vice would be likely to elaborate. Here, without any trace of irony, the pseudo-Renaissance worship of paganism, the immoderate love of form and art, the disdain of science and philosophy, are all lashed in a manner which is no doubt not unanswerable, but which is far more effective than most of the assaults made on the poet himself, and on those who are in general of the same temper. Meanwhile the paper is interesting, written as it was when many, if not most, of the *Fleurs du Mal* were actually composed, and when the poet was intending to publish them, as a proof of his rare power of looking on the other side. It shows what his sentiments were when he took the purely dramatic view of his favourite subjects and feelings, as in

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fact he appears very generally to have done; and a passage from it forms an appropriate pendant to the two already cited, as explanatory both of these subjects and feelings, and also of his attitude towards them :—

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

> Le goût immodéré de la forme pousse à des désordres monstrueux et inconnus. Absorbées par la passion féroce du beau, du drôle, du joli, du pittoresque, car il y a des degrés, les notions du juste et du vrai disparaissent. La passion frénétique de l'art est un chancre qui dévore le reste : et comme l'absence nette du juste et du vrai dans l'art équivaut à l'absence d'art, l'homme entier s'évanouit ; la specialisation excessive d'une faculté aboutit au néant.

It would be impossible to produce an instance of a mind conceiving and expressing more clearly the dangers of an exaggeration of its own tendencies; it would be impossible also to find any possessing in a fuller degree the rare capacity of seeing all sides of a question. In the critical dicta of such a mind, and in the artistic creations wherein it expresses its ideas, there is a truth and a security which are quite absent from the more apparently moderate utterances of less catholic thinkers.

It is necessary, therefore, for the reader who is to understand and appreciate fully and fairly the *Fleurs du Mal* and the *Petits Poëmes en Prose*, to bear in mind the idiosyncrasies of the author as to taste and temperament, and to comprehend fully the aim and object of the work. This latter is, in few words, to give poetical expression and currency to the vague joys and sorrows, the faint

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and fleeting impressions and beliefs, that occupy with more or less obstinacy and continuity the modern cultivated mind. Possessing himself a typical mind of this sort, open to all influences, able to detect all motives, and to analyse whatever strange fancy or feeling may present itself, Baudelaire possesses at the same time a singular faculty of projecting himself out of the circle of his individual tastes and sentiments, and of depicting these at once with the impassive accuracy of an impartial observer and with the sympathetic accuracy of a fellow-sufferer. He is further qualified for the task by the possession of a quite extraordinary spirit of precision and concentration. The curious particulars which M. Asselineau and others give us of his scrupulous attention to the correction of the press are characteristic of his accuracy in other and less mechanical matters. Dealing as he does with a class of subjects in which vague treatment is particularly tempting, and precise treatment peculiarly difficult, he is as accurate in the choice and conduct of his expressions as in the choice and conduct of his verse.

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

The *Fleurs du Mal* consisted, in the original and suppressed edition, of one hundred poems; in the second, of one hundred and twenty-six; and in the *édition définitive* of 1869, of one hundred and fifty-one, to which must be added a score or so of pieces which the French publishers have been unable or unwilling to insert, but which are easily

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obtainable in Belgian editions. No one of these poems exceeds a few pages in length, and the great majority are quatorzains or quartettes of four-line stanzas. The general title, *Fleurs du Mal*, which is said to have been of M. Hippolyte Babou's invention, has several sub-titles, under which the various pieces are grouped. The first of these divisions, which contains by far the greater number of the poems, is entitled *Spleen et Idéal*. The pieces included under it go far to present a complete picture of the mind and its wanderings in what may be called the second Romantic stage. The first, of which Byron is the natural representative and spokesman, contented itself, as was indeed natural in a child of the eighteenth century, with simple discontent at the limited capacity of its own stomach. A universe not materially differing from the present save in two points, greater attainability of sweet victuals and a total absence of headache and indigestion, would have exactly met the views of this school. But as La Mettrie produced Diderot, so does Byron produce Baudelaire. The inadequacy of the complaints and desires of the first school was so glaring, that matters could not fail to take the turn which actually followed. The Byronic and Wertherian youth became a highly respectable solicitor or coal-merchant, whose dark imaginings soon limited themselves to a possible crisis in the money market.

Gradually and unequally the second stage in

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CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

the disorder made its appearance, the great Romantic movement of 1830 being rather a sign of it than its actual embodiment. The Romantic of the second stage suffers from a disorder radically different from the measles incidental to his predecessor. He has not as a rule any very glaring outward symptoms. He does not think it necessary to go to bed at 6 o'clock A.M., to drink half-a-dozen of claret, or to wear collars of peculiar cut. He needs not the ἐωλοκρασία of some previous debauch to disgust him with things in general. He has probably satisfied himself tolerably early that there is nothing for which he wishes very much, and that if he had what he may happen to wish for he would not be much the better for it. He has a kind of general aspiration towards the infinite, the vague, the impossible, but he does not go about the streets shouting out these words and his desire for the things they signify. His heart is not worn on his sleeve. Sometimes he takes an interest in things political and religious, and believes in the millennium; but in this case his disease is not incurable, and he is hardly of the purest breed. In art, and above all in literature, he finds a certain solace—a solace which to some natures is all but sufficient. To science he is indifferent, if not absolutely hostile. Of such a mind as this the poems entitled *Spleen et Idéal*, miscellaneous as they may appear at first sight, will be found to present a tolerably correct diorama. Of its fits of

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despondency, or rather of the permanent background which appears whenever no special thought or interest occupies the foreground, of its occasional ecstasies, of the subjects of art or nature which gain its attention, the three following poems may serve as illustrations. Their poetical merit, here as elsewhere, is such as to need no impertinence of superfluous comment. Baudelaire sometimes borrowed his canvases: the work on them is always emphatically his own.

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

LA CLOCHE FÊLÉE

Il est amer et doux, pendant les nuits d'hiver,
D'écouter, près du feu qui palpite et qui fume,
Les souvenirs lointains lentement s'élever
Au bruit des carillons qui chantent dans la brume.

Bienheureuse la cloche au gosier vigoureux
Qui, malgré sa vieillesse, alerte et bien portante,
Jette fidèlement son cri religieux,
Ainsi qu'un vieux soldat qui veille sous la tente !

Moi, mon âme est fêlée ; et lorsqu'en ses ennuis
Elle veut de ses chants peupler l'air froid des nuits,
Il arrive souvent que sa voix affaiblie

Semble le râle épais d'un blessé qu'on oublie
Au bord d'un lac de sang, sous un grand tas de morts,
Et qui meurt sans bouger, dans d'immenses efforts !

HYMNE

À la très-chère, à la très-belle,
Qui remplit mon cœur de clarté,
À l'ange, à l'idole immortelle,
Salut en immortalité !

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Elle se répand dans ma vie
Comme un air imprégné de sel,
Et dans mon âme inassouvie
Verse le goût de l'éternel.

Sachet toujours frais qui parfume
L'atmosphère d'un cher réduit,
Encensoir oublié qui fume
En secret à travers la nuit.

Comment, amour incorruptible,
T'exprimer avec vérité ?
Grain de musc qui gis invisible
Au fond de mon éternité !

À la très-bonne, à la très-belle,
Qui fait ma joie et ma santé,
À l'ange, à l'idole immortelle,
Salut en immortalité !

LA VIE ANTÉRIEURE

J'ai longtemps habité sous de vastes portiques
Que les soleils marins teignaient de mille feux,
Et que leurs grands piliers, droits et majestueux,
Rendaient pareils, le soir, aux grottes basaltiques.

Les houles en roulant les images de cieux,
Mêlaient d'une façon solennelle et mystique
Les tout-puissants accords de leur riche musique
Aux couleurs du couchant reflété par mes yeux.

C'est là que j'ai vécu dans les voluptés calmes,
Au milieu de l'azur, des vagues, des splendeurs
Et des esclaves nus, tout imprégnés d'odeurs,

Qui me rafraîchissaient le front avec des palmes,
Et dont l'unique soin était d'approfondir
Le secret douloureux qui me faisait languir.

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These pieces, one hundred and seven in number, and of the utmost diversity in nominal subject, are succeeded by a group closely connected in subject as well as in treatment. "Tableaux Parisiens" are the effect resulting from the action of the large and complicated, yet still in a manner restricted, life of a great city, upon such an imagination as we have already described. There are in the latest edition twenty of them, almost all sombre in character, but of singularly uniform excellence. "Rêve Parisien" and "Les Petites Vieilles" are among the poet's most frequently cited works, and, indeed, few things are more striking than the address to the

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

> Ève octogénaires
> Sur qui pèse la griffe effroyable de Dieu,

which drew from Victor Hugo the characteristic remark that Baudelaire "avait créé un frisson nouveau." "Le Vin," which follows, illustrates the same idea as that which we have already noticed in *Les Paradis Artificiels*—the episodes of forgetfulness intercalated in the intervals of spleen by wine and other stimulants. As is usual with Baudelaire, the five pieces which compose this group are of even excellence, but "Le Vin de l'Assassin," the idea of which, as we learn from other sources, the poet had intended to dramatise, deserves special mention. A man has murdered his wife, influenced by a curious medley of feelings, and the poem renders his soliloquy after the deed

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with a quite unrivalled cunning of interpretation and mastery of expression. But it is in the succeeding division, the "Fleurs du Mal," properly and specially so called, that the poet's powers show themselves at the fullest.

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

The group "Révolte," which follows, does not appear to be equally satisfactory. The three pieces of which it is composed, "Le Reniement de Saint Pierre," "Abel et Cain," and "Les Litanies de Satan," whatever their merits in versification and expression, seem out of place in "Les Fleurs du Mal." The temperament which the poet illustrates does not so much oppose Christianity as ignore it. It is not even the Voltairian "l'infâme," but the general arrangement of the universe which is the object of its aversion, and this aversion is not, as a rule, violently expressed. "Révolte" is, therefore, dramatically a fault, and mars the otherwise admirable composition of the book.

"La Mort" in many of its phases worthily completes the work in a strain of consolation, almost of triumph. In the last poem of all, "La Voyage," the author, after again describing, now no longer partially, the temper of the minds on which he has turned the glimmer of his lantern, concludes thus:—

O Mort, vieux capitaine, il est temps! levons l'ancre,
Ce pays nous ennuie, ô Mort! Appareillons!
Si le ciel et la mer sont noir comme de l'encre,
Nos cœurs que tu connais sont remplis de rayons.

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Verse nous ton poison pour qu'il nous réconforte !
Nous voulons, tant ce feu nous brûle le cerveau,
Plonger au fond du gouffre, Enfer où ciel qu'importe,
Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du nouveau !

It is not difficult to appreciate the general features of Baudelaire's poetry. The first thing, perhaps, which strikes a careful observer is that it is singularly un-French. The characteristics which one is accustomed to look for in French poetry, even in that which has been most exposed to the denationalising influences of the Romantic movement, are almost entirely absent. The medium of expression is for the first time entirely under the control of the artist. Even Victor Hugo and Théophile Gautier, able as they undoubtedly are to say anything, show more traces of the restraining influence of the language than does Baudelaire. Whether this be owing merely to artistic mastery, or to the absorbing and unprovincial character of the thoughts which he chiefly expresses, it is certain that it exists to a degree which prevents, or long prevented, many Frenchmen from thoroughly admiring the poet. They miss the accustomed turns of thought and expression, the *poncif* from which not even 1830 was able thoroughly to disengage French poetry. Both in reading published criticisms and in conversation, it is usual to find them preferring the least characteristic pieces, poems such as "Don Juan aux Enfers" or "La Géante," which are merely

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very excellent examples of a style in which fifty Frenchmen have done nearly as well, and two or three better. But the poems quoted above, and many others of equal or superior attractions, which exhibit almost for the first time in French the vague yearnings, aspirations, complaints, and despair to which the English and German languages lend themselves so readily, are far less generally appreciated. The iron of language and prosody has entered into the soul of the average Frenchman to such an extent that he can hardly understand freedom; and this is indeed scarcely to be wondered at by any one who knows what the laws and conditions of French poetry really are. Judicious recurrence to old modes of speech has to a great extent strengthened and suppled the vocabulary, and diligent study of the *Pléiade* has enriched the repertory of metres; but what, after all, is to be done with a language which practically possesses but one foot—the iamb? Let any one take an English poet and see what the result of cancelling almost all his anapæstic and trochaic rhythm would be. The French versifier is in fact very much in the position of a man with one hand tied behind his back, and three fingers of the other hand disabled. Nothing in versification is more wonderful than the ingenuity with which the great French poets of the century have endeavoured to get the better of their restrictions, and have managed to produce such lyrics as Victor

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

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Hugo's *Chasseur Noir* and Théophile Gautier's *Barcarolle*.[1]

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

But Baudelaire's great peculiarity and excellence is that he manages to produce almost endless variety of metrical and rhythmical effect without having recourse to any mechanical aids of complicated metre and rhythm; by far the larger number of his poems being written in ordinary Alexandrines or eight-syllabled verses arranged in simple four-lined stanzas. It is not at all improbable that the superior merit of his Alexandrines is owing to his never having written acted plays; but whatever be the cause of the merit it certainly exists, and his verses stand almost alone in their singular variety of cadence and consequent flexibility of expression. In many of his poems, notably in *Une Martyre*, he has managed to stamp such a character of sombre horror on the verse that if syllables of similar sound but unknown sense

[1] Since their day, and Baudelaire's, efforts have been made not merely to supple the bonds but to destroy them altogether. M. de Banville, the most scholarly of prosodists, reverted in some cases to an archaic disregard of the caesura and of the fixed alternation of masculine and feminine rhymes. More recently still M. Verlaine has taken still greater liberties, and the youngest school, yet more greatly daring, have tried to get rid of the value of the mute *e* and to introduce a new prosody altogether. This is, pretty certainly, like all new prosodies, doomed to failure, even if it were taken up by persons of much greater genius than those about M. Jean Moréas. But it is probable that some of the more artificial rules will be gradually disregarded. See for some further remarks on this head the Essay on "The Contrasts of English and French Literature," *infra*. [1892.]

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were substituted, the general effect would still be maintained. It is undoubtedly in the production of this kind of effect, varied and enhanced by touches of quiet beauty, that he chiefly excels, displaying, to apply differently a verse of his own—

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

Le reflet inattendu d'un bijou rose et noir.

But original as Baudelaire unquestionably is, he is not any more than others a literary Melchisedec, and I should be inclined to trace the origin of this peculiar manner in part to one of the earlier romantics, Petrus Borel. Petrus has had rather hard measure in one of Baudelaire's critical essays, and in truth his various extravagances, his *bousingotisme* and lycanthropy, were not calculated to attract the younger poet, whose undemonstrativeness and hatred of exaggeration carried him to the other extreme. But Baudelaire has fully acknowledged the excellence of the piece which I have here in view—the preface in verse to *Madame Putiphar*. This poem may be found at length in Asselineau's *Bibliographie Romantique*, and is one of the most remarkable in modern French poetry. It is with considerable difficulty that a reader well acquainted with the *Fleurs du Mal* can bring himself to believe that it is not Baudelaire's own, with a difference. The spirit is the same, the style with its sombre glitter is the same, and the chief point of contrast is the less severe dignity of language and versification.

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The resemblance of the *Petits Poëmes en Prose* to the work of another early romantic, Louis Bertrand, though avowed, is less striking. Bertrand's work, *Gaspard de la Nuit*, which a reprint in 1869 has enabled those who wish to study, no doubt suggested to Baudelaire the idea of elaborating short pieces of prose with the unity, precision, and adornment of verse; but the execution of the two is very different, and a consideration of its differences would afford an admirable exercise in criticism. Bertrand seems to have proposed to himself the execution in prose of something similar to those poems which have been among the chief results of 1830, poems exhibiting some definite pictorial subject in a pictorial manner. Accordingly his pieces are all very short, and are divided into staves of about equal length, each of which corresponds to a four-line stanza. The book, even in its reprinted form, being not widely known, I may give as a specimen, not the best but one of the shortest of the pieces :—

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

L'HEURE DU SABBAT

C'est ici ! et déjà, dans l'épaisseur des halliers qu'éclaire à peine l'œil phosphorique du chat sauvage tapi sous les ramées.

Aux flancs des rocs qui trempent dans la nuit des précipices leur chevelure de broussailles ruisselante de rosée et de vers luisants.

Sur le bord du torrent qui jaillit en blanche écume au front des pins, et qui bruine en grise vapeur au front des châteaux :

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Une foule se ressemble innombrable, que le vieux bucheron attardé par les sentiers, sa charge de bois sur le dos, entend et ne voit pas.

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE. Et de chêne en chêne, de butte en butte, se répondent mille cris confus, lugubres, effrayants "Hum! hum!—schup! schup!—coucou! coucou!"

C'est ici le gibet! Et voilà paraître dans la bruine un juif qui cherche quelque chose parmi l'herbe mouillée, à l'éclat doré d'une main de gloire.

This book is the very triumph of word-painting, a *tour de force* of the most wonderful kind, executed in most attractive manner, and with matchless felicity and taste, but still a *tour de force.* What is the province of one art is necessarily not the province of another art, and this Baudelaire's finer literary sense enabled him to perceive. There is accordingly in the *Petits Poëmes en Prose* much less of the merely pictorial, and much more appeal to the intellect and the imagination. He has also rejected the division into staves or fragments. Every one of the *Petits Poèmes* is a strictly proper and legitimate piece of prose, in which no ornament or device of an unusual or unprosaic kind is employed. But it is prose employed to serve a new purpose, the presentation of a definite and complete image, thought, or story in a definite, complete, and above all, brief form. The precise presentation within contracted limits, and the employment of an extraordinarily refined and polished style, are the sole differentiating factors, but the variety and originality which their introduction produces are unmistakable. Such pieces as *Un Hémisphère*

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dans une Chevelure and *Les Bienfaits de la Lune* show what prose can do, if not to the utmost extent possible, certainly to the utmost extent known to the present writer. Others, as *La Belle Dorothée* and *L'Invitation au Voyage*, have an additional interest, because we can compare them with the poet's own treatment of the same subjects in verse. But all, with hardly any exception, display the same extraordinary supremacy of composition and the same mastery over language. Indeed it is not unusual to find persons of no inadequate competence who actually prefer these prose pieces to the author's poetical works, though the preference is probably in some measure due to the curious secret repugnance to French poetry which prevails so largely and to which I have already alluded. But there can be no doubt that the *Petits Poëmes en Prose* are of almost equal merit with the poems proper, and deserve almost equal attention.

The question of the relation of Baudelaire's poetry to morals is one which were it not forced upon me I should either not treat at all or pass over very lightly. For by so doing I should best express my most hearty concurrence with those who deprecate entirely the introduction of such questions into matters of literature, and who deny *ab initio* the jurisdiction of the court. For my own part I have little or nothing to add to the arguments which have already been produced on

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CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

a subject where the argument is on one side and the authority on the other. It is sufficient for me, that the introduction of morality is a μετάβασις ἐς ἄλλο γένος, a blunder and a confusion of the stupidest kind.[1] But Baudelaire's position in regard to this matter is so strange that it is impossible to pass it over. The author of a condemned book—condemned under a *régime* which has justly or unjustly become almost a by-word for the lax morality in conduct and language which it permitted if it did not actually encourage—he has naturally seemed to virtuous men of letters a perfectly safe figure, when they happen to be in need of a vituperative parallel. But if these virtuous persons, in quest (of course only in the pursuit of knowledge) of inspiriting indecency, should happen to invest in a copy of the *Fleurs du Mal*, even with the condemned pieces attached, I am afraid they would meet with a disappointment similar to that which Mr. Charles Reade described so graphically in *It is never too late to mend*. Indeed, on reading the book it is impossible not to understand and sympathise with the poet's astonishment at the prosecution and its result. The pervading tone, from a moral point of view, is simply a profound and incurable discontent with things in general, a

[1] I may be perhaps permitted to try a formula of this endless debate. If any subject can be poetically treated, that subject becomes poetical: if in the eyes of competent judges the treatment is not poetical, either the subject is impossible generally or impossible in the particular case. [1892.]

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discontent which may possibly be unchristian, but which is not yet an indictable offence in any country that I know of. Among nearly two hundred poems there are barely half-a-dozen the subjects of which come in any way within the scope of that elastic but apparently delicate commandment, infringements of which (or rather incitements to infringements of which) put legislators and moralists so terribly on the *qui-vive*. We all know of course that you may write about murder as often as you like, and no one will accuse you of having committed that crime. You may depict an interesting brigand without being considered a thief. Nor in either case will you be thought an inciter to either offence. But so soon as you approach the other deadly sin of Luxury in any one of its forms, instantly it appears self-evident that you not only take pleasure in those who do these things but also do them yourself. In Baudelaire's case the immorality is, as Gautier says, "si savante, si abstruse, si enveloppée de formes et de voiles d'art," that it might surely have been regarded as comparatively harmless.

But it may very likely still be asked what the object of the present essay is? Baudelaire, it will be said, even granting his merits, is not a writer likely to be at any time popular, while on the other hand those who are akin to him by their tastes and studies are probably already acquainted more or less with his works. It might be answered

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CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

that the latter point is at least doubtful, and that even were it not so, the purpose of the writer would place it beside the question. To show the value of Baudelaire's work—a value most certainly still underrated in England, and not even yet always allowed in France—has been the object of this essay, and if this has been in any measure attained I am content. But there is a collateral issue of almost greater importance. It is not merely admiration of Baudelaire which is to be persuaded to English readers, but also imitation of him which is with at least equal earnestness to be urged upon English writers. We have had in England authors in every kind not to be surpassed in genius, but we have always lacked more or less the class of *écrivains artistes*—writers who have recognised the fact that writing is an art, and who have applied themselves with the patient energy of sculptors, painters, and musicians to the discovery of its secrets. In this literary salt of the earth our soil has not been plentiful, and in a transition epoch, when there is nothing very much to say, the want of care in the manner of saying is especially glaring and painful. In this point France has been far ahead of us for the last fifty years, and it is only of rather late years that much effort has been made on our side. With the usual wastefulness of material affluence we have relied on fulness of thought and natural aptness of language to supply the want of careful and tasteful

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industry. In poetry this reliance has not altogether failed us. But in prose matters have been far different. A hundred years ago style was not an unknown thing among Englishmen; at the present day it would be easy to count on one hand the living writers who think of anything but of setting down the first words which occur to them as capable of clearly and grammatically expressing their thought.[1] That word and phrase are capable of management till they present a result as different from the first crude jotting as a Vandyke from a schoolboy's caricature, seems to be a truth utterly neglected if not utterly forgotten. Nor can we wonder at this if we look at the singular ineptitude in this matter of the average critic. When professional critics tell us that we must admire a certain poet's poems because he recognises the divinity of endurance, that we must not admire such and such an author's translations because his reading has been desultory, that the "Ancient Mariner" is defective as a poem because it is inconclusive as a plea against cruelty to animals—we can hardly wonder at the attitude of the general public. That attitude was formulated once for all in the phrase "I must take pleasure in the thing represented before I take pleasure in the representation." Or, as it was

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

[1] This is not quite true now. But the fingers of one hand will still suffice to count those who, having any thought to express, express it in a style at once individual, adequate, and irreproachable. [1892.]

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said of old time to one expatiating on the beauties of Flameng's etching after Herrera, *L'Enfant à la Guitare*, "I wonder you like that. *I thought you hated babies.*" That any one should care for form apart from subject was incomprehensible.

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

To remove as much as possible this incomprehensibility by precept and example, in criticism as well as in original work, is the business as it seems to me of all English artists, and of the English prose writer especially, inasmuch as his own art is in worse case than any. If in matter of prose style "nous avons perdu le chemin de Paros," it must be rediscovered. To the end that this may be done I know nothing more important than the study of those authors, in prose and verse, who have been most careful and most successful in like attempts before us, and of such authors I know none more suitable to the purpose than Baudelaire. His work measured by volume is not great. But in that work there is no line of careless or thoughtless execution, no paragraph where taste or principle has been sacrificed for praise or pay, for fear or favour, no page where the humanist and literary ideal is not steadily kept in view and exemplified. Valuable and delightful as he is for private study with no further end, he should be yet more valuable and productive of multiplied delight as a model and a stimulant. It was once reported of a scholar not unknown at one of our universities, that before going to bed he invariably, in conscious or

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unconscious extension of ancient habits, read a sonnet of Shakespeare. If this practice should spread, and manuals of profane devotion become common among men of letters, I know none that I should be tempted to adopt myself, and to recommend to others, in preference to the writings of Charles Baudelaire.[1]

CHARLES BAUDELAIRE.

[1] I have nothing to withdraw in these latter pages, but I may invite reference to some cautionary remarks in a later-written essay —the first in this volume. I ought doubtless to have remembered the latter part of the oracle—

ἥξει Δωριακὸς πόλεμος, καὶ λοιμὸς ἅμ' αὐτῷ. [1892.]

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VIII

THE YOUNG ENGLAND MOVEMENT

"They recognised imagination in the government of nations as a quality not less important than reason. They trusted much to a popular sentiment which rested on a heroic tradition, and was sustained by the high spirit of a free aristocracy. Their economic principles were not unsound, but they looked on the health and knowledge of the multitude as not the least precious part of the wealth of nations. . . . They were entirely opposed to the equality of man. . . . They held that no society could be durable unless it was built on the principles of loyalty and religious reverence."

THE YOUNG ENGLAND MOVEMENT.

THE above words, taken from the well-known preface to *Lothair*, refer, it need hardly be said, to the writer's own works. "They" are books, not men. But the passage is by no means an insufficient description of the persons and the principles that directed what is called Young England. Without an investigation which would certainly be long, and would probably be tedious, it would not be easy to trace the copyright of the adjective "young," as applied in this way to a national substantive.

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In the second quarter of this century Young France, Young England, and Young Ireland successively exemplified the compound in different ways. Young France was mainly literary and artistic, with a slight dash of politics, chiefly in the eccentric form of *bousingotisme*: Young Ireland was desperately political, with a slight infusion of literature; but Young England might justly claim to be a good deal wider in its aspirations than its forerunners who crowded to support *Hernani*, or its imitators who dilated on the excellence of the pike as a vehicle of reform, in the columns of the *Nation*. It was political first of all, but it took a wide view of politics, and it recognised *quicquia agunt homines* as part of the politician's subject and material. This was its main differentia, and in this lies the excuse for the foibles which, as in all such cases, attracted most popular attention to it. No doubt some of its members paid more attention to the fringe than to the stuff: that is usual and inevitable in all such movements. No doubt some joined it for the sake of the fringe only; that is also inevitable. But any one who talks and thinks of it as of a thing chiefly distinguished by the fact that one of its heroes invented white waistcoats, and by the fact that some of its followers emulated, or suggested, the harmless freaks of Mr. Lyle in *Coningsby*, and Mr. Chainmail in *Crotchet Castle*, may rest assured that he knows very little about it.

THE YOUNG ENGLAND MOVEMENT.

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THE YOUNG ENGLAND MOVEMENT.

It is never very easy to trace the exact origin of the complicated phenomena which are called movements. Few people nowadays fall into the slovenly error of attributing the Reformation wholly to Luther, or setting down the French Revolution to the machinations of an entirely unhistorical Committee of Three, composed of Voltaire, Diderot, and Rousseau. The movement now specially before us being a much looser, and a much less striking, as well as in its immediate effects a much more unimportant, example of its kind than either of these, is proportionately more difficult to isolate and to analyse. But it is perfectly certain that it was a branch or an offshoot, whichever word may be preferred, of the great Romantic revival which affected all Europe during the first quarter of the century. This revival has been repeatedly judged in a summary fashion, and the judgments have not, as a rule, been very happy. The reason is not far to seek: it is to be found in the general omission to recognise the fact that it was a revolt, but a revolt against usurped authority, and so partook after all of the nature of reaction and restoration. The formulas of the Reformation and the Renaissance had crusted and crystallised the literary and political, as well as to a less degree the social life of Europe: the Romantic revival cracked the crust, and dissolved the crystals. It would lead us altogether too far to attempt the general results of this process,

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but one special result is the special subject before us.

THE YOUNG ENGLAND MOVEMENT.

The political, social, literary, and religious life of England between the Revolution and the beginning of the nineteenth century had been exceptionally affected by the formulas just mentioned. It had not developed any gigantic abuses. There was no need of an English Revolution, and no general desire for one. English literature had at no time fallen into the portentous state which French literature presented when the great *philosophes* dropped off one by one. The Church of England was orthodox in belief, decent in conduct, and influential in the State. But everything was conventional, and often most absurdly and contradictorily conventional. Morals were somewhat loose, but the code of manners was extraordinarily strict. The country was a free country, but the franchise was quaintly allotted, and seats were sold in the open market. The Government was a party Government; yet from the fall of Bolingbroke to the rise of Liverpool there were not a half-a-dozen statesmen who can be labelled as distinctly Whig or distinctly Tory in principle. The free and independent elector was the Omphalos of the constitution; but it was understood that the free and independent elector would for the most part vote for members of certain houses, or those who were favoured by certain houses. It was the country of Shakespeare; yet men of genius and talent

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wrote *Irene* and *Douglas*, and did not put them in the fire when they had written them. It was the country of Arthur (at least of the Arthurian legends) and Harold, of Cœur de Lion and Becket, of Chandos and Chaucer, of Occam and Scotus; yet people talked contemptuously of the "dark ages," and never willingly looked beyond 1688, except to pay a regulation compliment to Queen Elizabeth and the Reformers. Of course there were exceptions to all this, but the general sentiment was as described. The sense of historic, social, literary, religious continuity was, if not lost, at any rate dulled. The pattern politician never looked beyond William the Deliverer: the pattern divine made as deep a trench at the Reformation as did his controversial opponents. Nobody, except a few eccentrics, could give a political reason for the faith that was in him, save from the Bill of Rights and the Act of Settlement; and the Thirty-nine Articles in the same way closed the ecclesiastical horizon. English poetry began, by grace of Dr. Johnson, with Cowley; as for English social life, it began and ended with the conventional environment of the individual, with the fashion of the family, "the town," the neighbourhood, the Court, or what not.

THE YOUNG ENGLAND MOVEMENT.

All this the Romantic movement, and its accompaniment the French Revolution, burst up in different ways; and most of those ways concern us a little, for most of them had something

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to do with Young England. It gradually drew into itself, or would have drawn, if it had ever become really powerful (for it must be remembered that it was, as far as direct effect went, very much of a failure), the dandyism of Byron and D'Orsay, the mediævalism of Scott, the Anglicanism of Coleridge and Wordsworth. It never, perhaps, as a matter of history, moulded these various things and others into a doctrine of politics and sociology so coherent as that which its most illustrious politician formulates, somewhat as an after-thought, in the motto of this essay, but it assimilated them more or less unconsciously. Among the numerous synonyms of the strictly meaningless terms, "Tory" and "Whig," "traditional" and "doctrinaire," perhaps deserve a place. The Young England movement was in all things traditional in its revolt against eighteenth-century convention, just as its enemy the Radical party was above all things doctrinaire in carrying out the same revolt. The Radical could find no logical reason why men should not be equal in privileges, and proposed to make them so: Young England pointed out that they had never been equal historically, and proposed to leave them as they were. The Radical could think of nothing better than *laissez-faire* for the regulation of social problems apart from the question of political and religious privilege: Young England had an amiable, if somewhat

THE YOUNG ENGLAND MOVEMENT.

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visionary, theory of mutual assistance which in a different form has been oddly enough taken up by some Radicals of to-day. With regard to the Church and the aristocracy, the Radical, after trying in vain to argue down to them from his general principles, would have none of them: Young England had its memory filled with the exploits of both in the past, and its imagination with the possibilities of both in the future. It was thus at once, and in a remarkable fashion, both reactionary and innovating. It proposed to employ innumerable forces which the official convention of the eighteenth century ignored; but they were all forces to be connected with—to be geared on to, so to speak—the traditional machinery of Government and society, in order to bring into play many wheels which the convention of the eighteenth century had neglected and left idle.

THE YOUNG ENGLAND MOVEMENT.

One of these forces was literature. The pen was, of course, no new power in politics, but it had latterly been considered a weapon for the irregulars. No Prime Minister, between Bolingbroke and Canning, left a literary reputation; Pulteney, and other statesmen who followed Pulteney, wrote chiefly in secret. This was, of course, the merest convention. It had no precedent before the eighteenth century, but the contrary; it had no foundation of reason whatever. Accordingly, the Young England movement was essentially a literary movement, and not least a literary movement

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applied to politics. The very dandies were not dandies merely, but wrote as earnestly as they dressed. They saw no reason why a gentleman should not be a gentleman of the press, and none why a gentleman of the press should not be a gentleman. In that there appears nothing at all extraordinary now. But when it is remembered that, by no means in the earliest days of the *Edinburgh Review*, Macvey Napier's contributors minced and made difficulties, which may yet be found in his correspondence, on the subject of receiving cheques, it may be seen that it required some courage to take the style and title which Mr. Disraeli took upon himself in the face of Parliament. The members of the movement, and especially one member, did more than despise the disqualification; they removed it. And in so doing they probably made not their least shocking innovation to steady-going Whigs and Tories, who looked on political writing, if not on all writing except that of an occasional poem or book of travels, as professional and undignified.

THE YOUNG ENGLAND MOVEMENT.

It is no part of the object of the present essay to go through the list of the men who took part in the movement. To mention the dead without mentioning the living would be incomplete; to mention the living would be to enter on that domain of gossip and personality which, in the present day especially, faithful servants of history

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and literature are especially bound to eschew.[1]

THE YOUNG ENGLAND MOVEMENT.

The worst enemies of Young England can hardly deny that it was a singularly wide-reaching movement. The literature of it corresponds to its width of reach, and any review of that literature would be impossible in the present limits. It had dandy literature, poetical literature, political literature —literature of all sorts and kinds. If it could have assumed a general motto, probably no better one could have been taken than a sentence from the *Life of Lord George Bentinck*: "The literary man who is a man of action is a two-edged weapon." Some of its devotees went in for tournaments, some for social reform, some for society, some for politics, some for art. It would scarcely be unfair to claim for Young England, in different ways, Pugin and the "Graduate of

[1] The remark still applies, though the ranks have been still further thinned. To one person thus removed, to Lord Houghton, the invention, not merely of the name, but of the movement itself, has sometimes been attributed. The next time that I met him after writing the essay reprinted in the text, he said to me, "I wish you had told me you were going to write that. I could have set you right on a great many things which nobody knows now except Lord John Manners," and he added, what indeed I knew, as to Mr. Disraeli, "He had nothing to do with it at first; he came in afterwards." I suggested to him that he had much better write the history himself, and he replied that he had thought of doing so, but "he was too old and it was too much trouble." However, on further persuasion, he said he would think of it; but I heard nothing further of it, and his executors do not seem to have found anything. The Duke of Rutland is now, I think, the very last survivor of the inner *cénacle*. [1892.]

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Oxford," Rossetti and "Felix Summerly." It had an extraordinary influence on the Universities, a still more extraordinary influence on the estimate of artistic matters in the press. All this, it may be said, was a matter of fringe—to use the phrase which has been already adopted. Be it so; but the fringe is part of the garment, and it is the part which most catches and touches outward things.

THE YOUNG ENGLAND MOVEMENT.

Fortunately, however, we are not reduced to arguing from mere retrospect. There is to be found, by any one who looks in the British Museum, a remarkable book, entitled *Anti-Coningsby*, and published in the year 1844. It is a very unequal book, and very badly planned; but there are passages and phrases in it which would not do discredit to Mr. St. Barbe himself. At the end of this book there is a satirical programme of a *Young England Journal*. The chief points in this programme may not be uninteresting, and are certainly unimpeachable as evidences of what was supposed by contemporaries to be the tendency of the movement. There are five points in this hostile representation. The *Young England Journal* will contain "slashing politics on both sides"; that is to say, it will advocate measures irrespective of the convenience of special sections of the actual governing cliques. It will contain unusually active foreign correspondence; that is to say, it will try and interest the average Briton

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in something beyond the cackle of his bourg.

THE YOUNG ENGLAND MOVEMENT.

A very strong point is made (with the evident expectation of a laugh) over the "History of Cricket," which a young peer will write in it. Another deals with the statistics which are to be given as to "the use of the new wash-houses." Lastly, a dead set is made on the display which will be made in the *Young England Journal* of "the virtues of Puseyism." These are the five points—omitting minor and personal matters—which the satirist marshals in his ironic charge against Young England. They were not of the orthodox Whigs or the orthodox Conservatives; they tried to interest Englishmen in the doings of the foolish foreigner; they took an interest in athletics; they condescended to such degrading particulars as the new wash-houses (washing-houses, to be very exact, is the form which our satirist prefers); and they held up the virtues of Puseyism.

Now let us look at these objects of the scorn of 1844 through the spectacles of half a century later. It may be as well to assure a sceptical generation that they were not drawn up of malice prepense by the present writer. They happen, indeed, to have been published before he was born. But I think, if we look at public matters to-day, we shall hardly find that the subjects to which the *Young England Journal* was supposed to be about to devote its attention, have been thrown into that dust-bin which in fifty years infallibly

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accepts political crotchets that have not life in them. "He was not of God," said Rochester of Cowley, profanely, doubtless, "and therefore he could not stand." The crotchets of 1844 have certainly stood. It would be very hard to bring the politics of either or any party to-day under those of one of those two "sides" which the scribe of fifty years ago indignantly assumed that all respectable people must adopt. We are not quite so indifferent about foreign correspondence as he seems to have held that we should be, and it will even be found on inquiry that nearly all the most interesting events of the last thirty years have concerned that matter. The subscribers to a journal of to-day would hardly feel scorn (except in so far as in the course of years the thing may have become stale) at a person of title writing a history of cricket, and athletics do not now occupy exactly the position which the satirist evidently thought they ought to occupy. Have we taken up his cue of sublime contempt of wash-houses, or have we interested ourselves more and more, as years have gone on, in wash-houses and all their kind? There are still, no doubt, varying opinions about the virtues of Puseyism; but it must be a singular social historian who will deny that what was at that date called Puseyism has grown and spread, and in itself or its offshoots gone far to cover the land in the last fifty years. So the satirist's own Young England is at any

THE YOUNG ENGLAND MOVEMENT.

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rate tolerably justified of its works by the progress of time. The demolition of that purely selfish party spirit which saw all things in the conquest or retention of "twelve hundred a year," is something; the breaking down of the merely insular conception of English politics, is something; the development of the physical education of the people, is something; *sanitas sanitatum* is something; the revival of vivid religious emotion and the knitting afresh of the connection of religion and art, is something. These are truisms—propositions almost shameful to be advanced, because of the impossibility of denying them. Yet a belief in these propositions is what our satirist of half a century ago charges on Young England. On his head be it!

THE YOUNG ENGLAND MOVEMENT.

It is scarcely possible to reiterate too often the caution that the conscious and the unconscious tendencies of this particular movement cannot be too carefully separated. It has just been seen that, if an enemy may be trusted, the description of the Young England crusade, given in the early part of this essay, is unimpeachable. No one can say *Quis vituperavit?* for we have the vituperation. But no doubt the movement was in many ways a blind movement. The very multiplicity of its aims, the diversity of its tendencies, the range of its sympathies, probably prevented most of those who took part in it from taking anything like a catholic survey of the field and the

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campaign. The accounts of its greatest leader are too characteristically fantastic to be accepted literally. They are more or less true as summaries of the facts, but they are not to be taken as absolutely trustworthy analyses of the motives. It is partly from looking at the results, partly from examining, as we have here examined, the testimonies of opponents, but most of all from comparison of the state of rival parties, that the true nature of this generally abortive yet specifically fruitful movement becomes evident. To the political student who has some experience in English history, the middle third of this century is a sufficiently dreary time, unless he has the gift of looking before and after. The ineptitude of most regular Whigs and Tories, each convinced that the country must be ruined if it did not employ them, and too many of each willing to ruin the country if it bade them do so as the price of employment; the opportunism of the Peelites, as dull and as selfish, but destitute of the traditional orthodoxy which half excuses the others; the doctrinairism of the Radicals, dullest of all and least irradiated by any sentiment, though faintly relieved by a certain intellectual consistency, make up a grisly procession of phantoms flitting across the political stage, in a manner no doubt supremely important to themselves at the time, but singularly forlorn to the posterity of spectators.

THE YOUNG ENGLAND MOVEMENT.

Amongst these the men of the Young England

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movement cannot be said to present a uniform or logically compact appearance. They are scattered, uncertain occasionally, futile often, running after a dozen hares at once, frequently failing to catch any. But they are at least generous, intelligent, conscious of the past, hopeful of the future, awake to the changed circumstances of modern life, and ready, each in his self-willed and confused way, with a plan of living to meet those circumstances. Some years ago we had a certain saying of Mencius held up to us in a Radical journal (I always like to quote authorities which cannot be suspected of extreme sympathy with my subject) as "worthy to be written in letters of gold in every legislative hall and municipal chamber in the country." The maxim is that, "if the people are made to share in the means of enjoyment, they will cherish no feelings of discontent." I do not know whether Young England read Chinese; it certainly had no legislative hall or municipal chamber of its own. But the motto was its motto from the beginning. Long after it had as a movement merged in the general stream of progress, Peacock, who had satirised its earliest forms in *Crotchet Castle*, returned as a kind of ghost to the world of novelists in *Gryll Grange*. He then found a new development to laugh at. The young peer did not equip a baronial hall or write (to the deep disgust of the author of *Anti-Coningsby*) on the history of cricket; but he lectured, and he was

THE YOUNG ENGLAND MOVEMENT.

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"pantopragmatic." It is thirty years and more since *Gryll Grange* was written, but young peers are expected to lecture and be pantopragmatic quite as much as ever. That is an offshoot of Young Englandism; whether good or bad, it is not to the present purpose to decide. It is sufficient to point out the numerous ways in which the movement did actually influence English life.

THE YOUNG ENGLAND MOVEMENT.

For, on the whole, the influence actually exerted was no doubt more social than political. It was of the very nature of the movement to blend social and political matters, and so in the long-run the social influence, transformed in the process, became a political one. But directly in the fusion of classes, or rather in the interesting of one class in another while retaining their division, and still more indirectly in its religious and artistic developments, Young England promoted a quiet social revolution. The historian of the future, if not of the present, will hardly hesitate about his answer to the question, Which have done the most for social progress, the Radical doctrinaires with their *reductio ad absurdum* in the Charter, or the advocates of cricket and wash-houses and libraries, of friendly communication between classes, of the spread of art, of religious services attractive to the general?

These latter ideas have of course long ceased to be the property of one party, political or other. In scuffling they change rapiers on that as on

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other stages, and the result is apt to be confusing to all but careful observers. The real tendency of the Young England movement is, as always, to be sought far less in the writings of those who supported it, than in the writings of those who opposed or stood aloof from it. A search on this principle, between 1840 and 1850, with a certain margin on either side of the decade, will not leave much doubt as to the real influence of the thing. Nowhere, for instance, is that influence more apparent than in the early writings of Charles Kingsley, certainly not a sympathiser with it or with many of its developments. Indeed, to trace the ramifications of agreement, dissent, protest, and silent adoption of more or less of the tendencies of the movement, would be to make a survey of the literature of the period. It is perceptible no less in *Past and Present* (far removed as Carlyle was from sympathy with Young England) than in the *Broad Stone of Honour*, little less in *The Princess* than in *Coningsby*. If the greatest literary name of the period, next to those of Carlyle and Tennyson, was rebel to its influence and wrote chiefly against it, that is because Thackeray was, in the first place, a satirist before all, and, in the second place (like Mr. Pendennis), singularly weak on politics and general history, and extraordinarily John Bullish in his prejudices. Young England was not John Bullish—it might, perhaps, have been a little more so with

THE YOUNG ENGLAND MOVEMENT.

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advantage—and it certainly presented a good many handles to the enemy who had command of irony. It was exceedingly easy to represent its members as belonging to "the order of the *gilets blancs*," and it was not so easy for an admirer of the eighteenth century to forgive the contempt it poured on that period. The difference is of little importance now. Indeed, cynics who see all things in letters may be rather grateful for it as having given us the admirable parody of *Codlingsby*, and the scarcely less admirable caricature-retort of St. Barbe. It has only been mentioned here because, with what it is hard to regard as anything but simple stupidity, some good people have thought to show their allegiance to Thackeray by scoffing at Young England. That is not the attitude of the critic, who does not take sides in such matters.

THE YOUNG ENGLAND MOVEMENT.

To sum up the social purport of the movement, Young England aimed at loosening the rigid barriers between the different classes of the population by the influence of mutual good offices, by the humanising effects of art and letters, by a common enjoyment of picturesque religious functions, by popularising the ideas of national tradition and historical continuity, by restoring the merriment of life, by protesting against the exchange of money and receipt for money as a sufficient summary of the relations of man and man. These were undoubtedly its objects; it

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would be difficult to show that they were the objects of any other party, school, sect, or class, at the time. But (and this is really the chief feather in the Young England cap) they were objects so obviously desirable that no one school, especially no one so loosely constituted, could monopolise them. English social life at large has, to a great extent, fallen into the lines thus indicated. It has been generally without much consciousness of the indicators, and often with not a little expressed ingratitude to them; but this matters very little to the historian. Parties much more definite, leaders much more one-ideaed, persistent and successful, have before now gone long without recognition, longer without gratitude. But recognition, if not gratitude, comes sooner or later to most, and it may fairly come now to the despised patrons of cricket and wash-houses who afforded so much amusement to the satirist of fifty years ago.

THE YOUNG ENGLAND MOVEMENT.

The political *mot*, on the other hand, of the Young England movement was not very different from Lord Beaconsfield's famous boast. It introduced the "gentleman of the press" to practical politics; it made the politician a gentleman of the press. Before 1830 political government had, in the first place, been recognised as belonging more or less to a select circle of families and officials, and, in the second, it had busied itself with a very restricted range of subjects. Social

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matters rarely came before Parliament, though they sometimes forced their way in —just as outsiders sometimes forced their way into political place and power. THE YOUNG ENGLAND MOVEMENT. The purpose, whether clearly or dimly understood and expressed, of Young England was to break down the monopoly while retaining the advantages of aristocracy; to enlarge the sphere of the politician, and to increase the number of levers on which he can work. It was opposed as much to the mechanical alternation of ready-made sets of governors which it found in existence, as to the mechanical manipulation of the constituencies which has grown up since its time. Whether in such a country as England the ideal of a nation following its "natural" leaders (be their letters of naturalisation due to birth or won by brains), feeling the historic estimate sufficiently to prevent change for change's sake, or for mere class interests, yet open to improvement, was a chimerical ideal or not, there is no need to attempt to decide here. But of one thing there is no doubt, that Young England was the most striking political result among us of the vast Romantic revival which influenced literature and religion so vitally; and that in establishing the impossibility of separating political from social questions, it had in its turn at least one result which cannot fail to be permanent.

For polemical purposes certain persons have called it a harlequinade. We make much

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allowance in England for polemical purposes, and some of the persons who so call it know that it was much more than a harlequinade. It was indeed, as has been pointed out, in many ways a failure. It had, according to that Scriptural doctrine which has been a favourite in our time with men so different as Guizot, Lord Tennyson, and M. Renan, to perish in order that it might produce its effect. The men who took part in it had too different and perhaps too inconsistent motives to bring it to any complete end. It lacked a general programme and a single purpose. Brilliant as was the talent of many who took part in it, none of them, perhaps, had that single-hearted and single-minded insanity of genius which carries a movement completely to its goal. But there is sufficient evidence to show that Young England on detached points was prophetic as well as enthusiastic, and that it divined and helped the tendency of the times in a manner which secures for it a place, and no mean place, in the social and political history of the country.

THE YOUNG ENGLAND MOVEMENT.

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IX

A PARADOX ON QUINET

ON the 14th of May 1883 there was unveiled, at Bourg-en-Bresse, the statue of a French man of letters, less known, perhaps, to English readers than any of his contemporaries of equal rank. It cannot be said that most of those who have endeavoured to make Edgar Quinet known to us have gone a very probable way to do it. Not very many years ago, a Professor of Modern History in one of the English Universities is said to have confessed, with much frankness, that he had never heard of him. He has since found a very sympathetic essayist in Professor Dowden, and a still more enthusiastic biographer in Mr. Richard Heath. But Professor Dowden, in an essay of much literary merit, begins by assuring us that "Quinet was first and chiefly part of the conscience of France." Those (and they are probably numerous) to whom this phrase conveys next to no meaning, may well think that Quinet, a somewhat mystical person himself,

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has found a more mystical expositor. Mr. Heath, whose book is a very useful biography as far as it goes (though, with characteristic oddity, it stops dead in the very middle of Quinet's life), has pitched it in an equally high key, even where its actual language is not composed of enigmas or conundrums. Treatment of this kind rather discourages a modest critic, who on the one hand feels that he cannot pretend to speak in the language of the seer, and who, on the other, is convinced that Quinet is worth expounding to a generation rather unlikely to study him for itself. He is a decidedly voluminous writer, and as some parts of the nominally complete edition of his works have, in accordance with a bad habit of French publishers, been re-issued with somewhat altered contents, it requires some vigilance on the part of the book-buyer or his book-seller to make certain that the volumes are really complete, and do not present any exasperating combination of gaps and duplicates. It so happens, too, that Quinet was a man of very varied sympathies, and in order to comprehend them it is almost necessary that the student should, at some time or other in his life, have taken an interest in divers sets and bundles of ideas. He was a theologian, a politician, a philosophical student, a literary critic, a poet, a historian, all in one, and sometimes all at once, and it requires a good deal of attention to decide in which character he is speaking at a given

A PARADOX ON QUINET.

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moment. But for this very reason he is very instructive study for a generation which, however much it specialises in the departments of thought which arrogate to themselves the name of science, mixes up its theology, its politics, its history, its poetry, and its philosophy, in a kind of general hotch-potch. I have ventured to say elsewhere that Quinet, like his friend Michelet, exhibits specially the defects of a period of journalism, and it follows almost naturally from this that he is a useful study for those who live in a period of journalism. But he is more than this. The constant mixture of motives and inclinations in him, and the effect which his political, philosophical, and religious views exercised on the quality and character of his literary productions, make him a singularly favourable subject for critical analysis of that effect and mixture. Such criticism is neither the least interesting nor the least valuable department of the critic's work.

A PARADOX ON QUINET.

There are few writers the character of whose work has been more moulded by external circumstances than was the case with Quinet. He had an idiosyncrasy certainly, but its development was influenced to a far more than ordinary extent by his parents, his place of abode, his friends, his lot in life. His father, Jérôme Quinet, was an ex-commissary of the Republican army, a Bonaparte-hater, a man of science, a martinet, and something of a cynic. His mother, whom he

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adored as it is the amiable fashion of Frenchmen to adore their mothers, was nominally a Protestant in religion, but really a kind of undogmatic Christian, with a strong emotional religiosity, directed into the vague, an admiration for Racine, and another admiration for Voltaire. His place of abode in his youth was in one of the most out-of-the-way districts of France, the heathy country near Bourg-en-Bresse, where he was born, a country of hills, sequestered pools, malaria, silence and solitude. Quinet grew up in an odd fashion. The name of the reigning emperor (Edgar was born in 1803) was for years never pronounced in the house, and the natural result, when the boy did come to hear of it, was a fit of suppressed Bonaparte-worship, which, perhaps, was never wholly cured. He was afraid of his father; he was taught by his mother to pray fervently to no one in particular, and to act scenes of Racine with her. In these circumstances he became a rather precocious and decidedly old-fashioned child. He was by no means unmanly; on the contrary, when the invasion came, he formed a kind of corps of boy volunteers; but neither his amusements nor his ways were those of the average boy, even the average French boy. He believed himself to be desperately in love when he was about thirteen, as, indeed, many other boys have believed themselves to be, but hardly in his high-flying fashion. When he came to go regularly to school,

A PARADOX ON QUINET.

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first at Bourg and then at Lyons, he was anything but happy, though his work, after a little time, gave him no trouble. At Lyons there was a grand barring-out in which his school-fellow, Jules Janin, took an active part. But Quinet wrote to his mother with portentous good sense, that "he had inquired into the reason of the revolt, the leaders had not been able to answer him, and after that, would she believe him fool enough to compromise his new happiness?" His principal amusement was playing the violin.

A PARADOX ON QUINET.

In 1820 Edgar Quinet was seventeen, full of books, full of dreams, not quite cured of his devotion to the beautiful Pulcheria, and more than ever given to writing long letters of almost rhapsodical affection to his mother. His masters at Lyons, finding that there was absolutely no mischief in him, had, after the first few months, allowed him almost entirely to take his own way. He was accordingly very ill prepared for his father's wish that he should enter the École Polytechnique to prepare for the army. He resisted vigorously, and M. Quinet, less tyrannical than many fathers whose characters have been described as more amiable, gave way, and consented that he should go into a banker's office. This did not please him much better. As a preparation for Paris and the desk, he went home, and resumed for months his wanderings and broodings among the heaths of the Ain. It is

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not to be wondered that he found the banker's office even more distasteful than he had anticipated. He held out for a short time, and then resigned his situation and went into open revolt and a garret. For a time his allowance was withheld, and he was in considerable straits; but there never seems to have been a complete rupture of relations with his family. During two years he did little but read and write, though he made some desultory and rather half-hearted attempts to study law, and went to a certain extent into society. His first book, the *Tablettes du Juif Errant*, appeared at his own expense at the end of 1821. He made pedestrian tours in various places; and though he was still nominally at issue with his father, the worst thing that happened to him seems to have been an occasional penitential residence at home, where he wandered, dreamed, and read as usual.

A PARADOX ON QUINET.

At last his opportunity came to him; he met with an English translation of Herder's *Philosophy of the History of Humanity*, and resolved to translate it himself into French, though he had to learn German first in order to do so. He did his task rapidly, and he had what must be called the remarkable luck of finding a publisher who gave him a hundred pounds for it, and paid part in advance. Out of this Quinet indulged himself in a trip to England in the spring of 1825. His good luck continued. The book introduced him to Cousin, who was already an influential, and

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was not, as he was later, a rather jealous patron; and at Cousin's house he met his *dimidium animæ*, Michelet. He wrote paper after paper; he made trips into Germany, studied there, fell in love there. He was always falling in love in an amiable and virtuous manner. At length, in 1829, he received an appointment on a French commission to Greece, where he gained credit, gathered the materials of a book, and enjoyed himself immensely in his own fashion. Indeed, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that Quinet was an exceptionally lucky man. Save for the one short and not very severe period of trial in Paris, everything fell out as he wished it. The home authorities grumbled, but did not proceed to extremities. When he began to live by literature, it was by the kind of literature that he liked and chose. He had none of the drudgery—journalism, or school-mastering, or even inferior official work—which the great majority of men of letters who are not born to fortune experience, and from which many of them never escape. He was always able to work as he liked, on what subject he liked, and as long as he liked. *Fortunati nimium* are such.

A PARADOX ON QUINET.

After the Greek mission, however, his luck turned a little. The Revolution of 1830 seemed promising; but Louis Philippe and Guizot did not want visionary Republicans, and Cousin was developing his constitutional jealousy. For a time Quinet was put off with fair words, but he was

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A PARADOX ON QUINET.

now completely familiar with the Paris literary circle, and he formed many projects and did some good work. His admirers have absurdly exaggerated the supposed discovery of Old French poetry that he made at this time. It did him, no doubt, great credit that he appreciated its merits; but the name of the late M. Paulin Paris, to mention no other, is enough to show how absolutely unnecessary it was for Quinet to "discover" the Chansons de Gestes. For two or three years he employed himself in this miscellaneous manner, and in 1831 the death of his father must have made it still more easy for him to follow his own devices. In 1833 he visited Italy; then he published *Ahasuerus*; then he married Minna Moré, the German girl with whom he had fallen in love years before. His marriage gave him much happiness, and may be said to have settled him in many ways. He planned and wrote *Napoléon* and *Prometheus*, went much into society, wrote a good deal in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, and generally became something of a personage; but it was not till 1839, when he was six-and-thirty, that a settled place was found for him by his nomination (still, it is said, rather against Louis Philippe's will) to a professorship at Lyons. In about three years he was moved by Villemain to a chair at the Collége de France, but in the meantime he had delivered the courses which he afterwards shaped into the *Génie des Religions*.

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There is no doubt that in a certain sense Quinet had found his vocation in the professoriate. He could, on occasion, both argue and state cases with accuracy, precision, and vigour in writing; but he was, on the whole, of "imagination too diffuse" (to borrow Mr. Gladstone's well-known and rather felicitous blunder) to be a great philosopher or a great historian. He had not the organs of expression, necessary to the poet, in any perfection or even in any considerable degree; but he had the oratorical power, the fertile fancy, the enthusiasm, the command of colour, which tell in lectures on any but purely scientific subjects. He was, accordingly, a very effective lecturer even at Lyons. When in 1841 he was transferred to the Collége de France, a special chair "des littératures Méridionales" was created in his favour. According to a system which he was one of the earliest to carry out thoroughly, he took much pains to qualify himself for his task by local and miscellaneous exploration. But unluckily he conceived it his duty to enter into a crusade against the Jesuits and Ultramontanism, being probably stimulated thereto (for *cherchez la femme* or *cherchez l'homme* is a constant caution necessary in Quinet's life and works) by Michelet. The two, with some assistance from the Polish poet Mickiewitz, succeeded in making the lecture-rooms of the Collége de France complete bear-gardens, the clericals and the anti-clericals assembling in equal force to

A PARADOX ON QUINET.

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groan or to applaud. Ministerial and professorial expostulations as to the extraordinary latitude which Quinet was giving himself were in vain; and at last, when he definitely announced a course on "Les Institutions de l'Europe Méridionale" (the reader may be requested to imagine the Taylorian professor at Oxford announcing a course on the Inquisition), the authorities had no choice, in the interests of education as well as of order, but to stop so manifest an abuse.

A PARADOX ON QUINET.

Quinet was bitterly mortified, but time soon brought him his revenge. The Revolution of February saw him, musket on shoulder, at the gate of the Tuileries; and this manifestation was rewarded by the colonelcy of the 11th Legion, by the restoration of his professorship, and by a seat in the Parliament of the New Republic. Here Quinet made no ill figure. If his politics were unpractical, they were generous and not too subversive of things existing; while, unlike some future comrades in exile even more illustrious in literature than himself, he from the first divined and distrusted Napoleon III. Exile could not but follow the *coup d'état* in his case, and he established himself at Brussels. His first wife had died shortly before, and he married again. His second wife was a Roumanian lady, the daughter of a local poet named Assaki, and the marriage had hardly less influence on him than Michelet's similar union. The seven years of his Brussels

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sojourn were not unfruitful, producing *Les Esclaves*, an edition (with an interesting memoir) of *Marnix de Sainte-Aldegonde*, a book on Roumanian independence, and other things. But when in 1858, owing partly to political reasons, he moved to Switzerland and established himself at Veytaux, on Lake Leman, the situation proved even more favourable. The country was stimulating to his genius; and before the fall of the Empire he had written *Merlin l'Enchanteur*, a vast prose dramatic epic (if such a heap of contradictions may be allowed); his history of the campaign of 1815; *La Révolution*, his largest, and in substance if not in style his most important single work; *La Création*, a semi-literary, semi-scientific production on about the same scale as *Merlin*; and a great many pamphlets on current events. The downfall of his enemy at once brought him back to Paris, where he spent the time of the siege, frequently exhorting his fellow-countrymen in eloquent harangues on paper. He survived the conclusion of peace four years, dying on the 27th of March 1875. He had been once more restored to his professorship, and was active with his pen till the last, his chief production being *L'Esprit Nouveau*, published a year before his death.

A PARADOX ON QUINET.

The work thus produced in more than fifty years of literary life is in many ways some of the most curious work to be anywhere found. No competent critic can read Quinet without

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perceiving that his literary powers are almost, if not altogether, of the first class.

A PARADOX ON QUINET.

No unprejudiced critic can read Quinet without acknowledging not only that no single performance of his is of the first class, but that it is to the last degree puzzling to what single work to refer a reader who is anxious to verify the flattering opinion of his powers just asserted. The *Tablettes du Juif Errant* is a clever trifle. The *Génie des Religions* has no doubt considerable merit as an early example of eloquent and ingenious generalisation; but for fully half a century the secret of its composition has been such an open secret that it can hardly be said, except for the purely literary merit of its detached passages, to be a very remarkable book. All have got the seed of it now, and one tutor at Oxford or Cambridge must have a difficulty in meeting another without smiling as they think of the patient undergraduate noting *vues d'ensemble*, which he is perfectly competent to take for himself, with a very little audacity. The lectures against Jesuitry and Ultramontanism are fair one-sided polemics, but the whole volume has not a tithe of the force and fire which dwells in Carlyle's single Latter-day Pamphlet. *Les Révolutions d'Italie* has much attraction. Some exquisite passages, an agreeable spirit of sympathy, and poetic appreciation, appear in it; but it is vitiated throughout by the fundamental historical delusion, that there ever was before 1859

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a political entity called Italy—before entertaining which delusion such a student as Quinet must have had to make believe very much indeed. The polemic against Strauss is indeed in parts extraordinarily vigorous; but here the writer is taking as it were a campaign with the Teutonic knights against the heathen, quite independent of his usual military service and allegiance. *Marnix de Sainte-Aldegonde* shows all Quinet's generous sympathy with liberty; but it is injured by the wilful shutting of its author's eyes to the fact that his hero was by no means a saint, and still more by his extraordinary want of humour. Whenever Quinet attempts humour he is simply terrible; Victor Hugo himself is a Swift to him. His description of the young German visiting France in his *Allemagne et Italie*, and his pretended critique of his own *Vacances en Espagne*, are among the most deplorable attempts to be funny of which any man of genius has been guilty for this last half century. In the *Marnix* he is not directly humorous; but the reader to whom the gods have given some slight appreciation of what humour is, can hardly fail to resent his comparison of Sainte-Aldegonde's dismal ribaldry with the immortal work of Rabelais from which it is imitated. The Roumanian book is of very little value. The poems, verse and prose, narrative and dramatic, literary and scientific, political and autobiographic, are, by the confession of Quinet's

A PARADOX ON QUINET.

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warmest admirers, at least as full of faults as of beauties. In verse, the author's imperfect command of poetical expression, of rhythm, of language, of suitable imagery, constantly makes itself felt. In prose, notwithstanding the almost inevitable passages of beauty—sometimes of exquisite beauty—the obscurity of the plan, the defect of central object and interest, do the greatest harm to the general effect. The letters and the earlier *Histoire de mes Idées* are charming, but not of a kind to found a reputation upon, though they contain the *pièces* for discovering Quinet's weakness. *The Campaign of 1815* is a careful and in parts effective though rather one-sided narrative, but it is nothing more. Most of the pamphlets are merely occasional, and hardly any are very forcible. *La Révolution* is a work of singular equity, originality, and (in part) merit; but its apologetic preface, of which more presently, is a key to all the contradictions of the author, and those contradictions assert themselves too vividly in the book itself to make it a masterpiece. The books written after the war show marks of age, and to a certain extent an undue crystallisation of ideas. All through the six-and-twenty volumes the reader wanders seeking a masterpiece, a representative and complete work, and he finds none. Yet when he comes to the end of them he has no doubt that, both as a man of letters, and (though with very extraordinary limitations) as

A PARADOX ON QUINET.

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a thinker, Quinet had not many superiors in his own time.

A PARADOX ON QUINET.

If, however, no result came of the reading of six-and-twenty volumes except the conviction of this paradox, the said reading would hardly be a justifiable employment for any one not condemned to penal servitude for life. For, owing to Quinet's inequality, he is not even invariably certain to give the reader pleasure, though a volume of beauties, if not two or three volumes, might be selected from him which would not be inferior in literary attraction to anything else of the kind existing. Such passages as that on the eternity of art in the *Génie des Religions*, and the wonderful description of the cathedral in *Ahasuerus*, cannot be too highly praised or too much enjoyed. But nobody who reads for anything besides mere amusement—indeed, nobody who finds amusement in getting the utmost edification he can out of his reading—can fail to ask himself the reason of this singular inequality and incompleteness. The solution is not very long in being found. It suggests itself even after reading the account of Quinet's early life; it suggests itself perhaps most strongly on comparing his works with those of Michelet, his sworn brother. No one can doubt that Michelet was a Democrat by the whole complexion and direction of his temperament. He is not merely intellectually convinced of Democratic theory: he is full of fervent love and admiration

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ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

undergraduate at Oxford professorial and tutorial chairs were still mostly held by disciples of Mr. Mill; and we explained (except some of us whom the gods made critical even then) everything by association. Mr. Mill died in the metaphorical as well as in the physical sense; Mr. Darwin succeeded him, and now the scientific explanation of all things is by selection and heredity, evolution and crossing. I think it excessively likely that many of my hearers, and not absolutely impossible that I myself, may live to see this in its turn succeeded by something else as popular, as satisfactory, as passing. These dominant keys to the mystery of the universe are in the truest sense

Priests that slew the slayer and shall themselves be slain.

They always tell some truth, and the truths they tell are always made to extend far too widely and to apply far too absolutely. Moreover, there is one thing specially questionable about them to a cool-headed observer. They can be made at pleasure to explain anything, to turn round (at least, for opening is another matter) in any lock. You find, for instance, a Frenchman who displays somewhat un-French characteristics, and you discover that he had an English mother or grandmother. Clearly the mother or grandmother explains. But when you find an Englishman who, though he had a French mother or grandmother, shows no French tendencies, are you puzzled?

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Not in the very least. You decide at once that the admixture of French blood has not been strong enough to divert or influence the plain English stream. If you find a man who displays the accepted characteristics of his race in an intense degree, this of course is an effectual proof that they *are* the characteristics of the race, and is highly gratifying. But it is scarcely less gratifying to find one in whom prevail characteristics widely different from, or even diametrically opposed to, those assumed as "racial." The atavist explanation will give you a delightful hunt: and even if this should prove fruitless, the well-known doctrine of repulsion or reaction from the *milieu* will demolish the difficulty triumphantly. In other words, a man with a tolerably fertile imagination and a little trick of logic (it will do no harm if he be specially expert in the department of fallacies) can adjust the theory—and all such theories—to any circumstances, and can perform to a miracle that kind of explanation of the problem which consists in restating it in other words. And I think that if he were as frank as Captain Dugald Dalgetty, he would take very much the captain's attitude towards all theories of the kind. He, you remember, after a pleasant summary of the party cries of his day added, "Good watchwords all—excellent watchwords! Whilk is the best I cannot say; but sure I am that I have fought knee-deep in blood many a day for one that was ten degrees

ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

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worse than the worst of them all." Substitute skull-deep in argument, and you have it.

ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

Let us therefore not attempt this side of the matter; and, however tempting they may be, let us decline both deductions from general race theories and paradoxes from individual contradictions of them. It is a curious thing no doubt, that what is by some accounts the highest poetry of the world, and is by general consent among the highest, comes from a race which is also by general consent one of the most prosaic, the most matter-of-fact, the most, as some would say, Philistine of races. It is curious again that the Frenchman who prides himself upon being *né malin*, upon his lightness and adjustability of wit, should be of all created beings not only the most disinclined to new ideas on many points, but the most positively incapable of entertaining them. A friend of mine who, if he has paid less attention to the literature of France than I have, has lived in France much more and knows Frenchmen in the flesh much better than myself, not long ago observed to me, "A Frenchman's mind is built in water-tight compartments, and when the bolts are once shot nothing can get in." These things, and other things like them, are interesting no doubt; but the consideration of them would only draw us away from our proper subject, and seduce us into pleasing but delusive generalisations of the kind to which I have referred already. Let us abstain from such Delilahs of the imagination, and come

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down to comparison of the actual course of the two literatures. Let us see, as far as we can in the time, what they have done, what they present between the covers of their million books, what we can actually conclude as to their agreements and differences, not on any *a priori* theories, but from simple induction based on the observed and arranged facts of the two histories. ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

In considering the first and not the least striking point of contrast between the two there is something—not much—which may offer a little initial difficulty. If I say, what I believe to be an undoubted fact, that the course of French literature is much longer and more unbroken than that of English, I am likely to be confronted with some indignant gainsayers who will accuse me of treason to Old English. Some of these, a hardy folk, would assert an apostolical succession of English from *Beowulf* (though nobody knows when *Beowulf* was written) to the very latest work of Lord Tennyson. Professor Earle, who has written a most interesting book on English prose, assures us that it was in full force in the tenth century; and I am not sure that he does not hold the English prose of the tenth century to be something which we are only laboriously endeavouring to equal now. Certainly French cannot pretend to any antiquity like this. But then what they call Old English, that is to say, everything before the thirteenth century or thereabouts,

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ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

is of such a nature that no one who merely knows modern English can read it except by guesswork. The earliest literary French that we have dates probably from the end of the eleventh century: and though I know that both in France and England there are those who deny it, I do not believe that any fairly intelligent man or woman who can read a French book of to-day will have much real difficulty in reading the *Chanson de Roland*. The difficulty that he or she will have, will be about the same which used to be felt in England before we became more familiar, and so not more contemptuous, but more at our ease with Chaucer.

Now the best criterion of a literature's identity is the being readable in all parts by intelligent and fairly educated persons without special study or great difficulty. Taking it as a starting-point we shall find that what I said just now about French and English is very fairly true; we shall find likewise that not only is the appearance of French as a literary language earlier, but its development is much more varied, regular, and equal. There is nothing at all surprising in this, nor need it grieve the self-love of any Englishman. Although French had undergone its process of transformation from Latin through the *Lingua Romana* with extraordinary rapidity and thoroughness—with thoroughness and rapidity for which I think there is elsewhere no parallel—it had always, so to

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speak, its ancestor at the back of it. In the four or five centuries during which the process of transformation lasted, all the educated part of the nation had the old literary language in more or less use, and some at least of its monuments in contemplation. The French, in short, in those days, whatever they have done in later ones, steadily "dwelt in the old house while the new was a-building," and it was impossible that the results of this should not make themselves felt.

ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

We, on the other hand, started with a great if undeveloped literary faculty—as Gothic and Icelandic and Old High-German, the kindred and ancestral tongues, show—but with no ancestry of written literature, and with the apparatus of the only literary tongue that to the knowledge of our ancestors existed, utterly unfitted for our use. We had to make all new apparatus for ourselves: the French found it to a great extent made for them. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the marks of this difference are on the two languages and the two literatures to this day. There is undoubtedly an Old English prosody and an Old English syntax, but both, and especially the former, are rudimentary compared to that shown by the first finished, which is also all but the first piece of organised, French. I do not think it at all fanciful or rash to trace to this difference the main divergence, too striking and manifold to have escaped any observer between the two—the

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divergence between order in the French and license in the English. Whether order was Heaven's first law I do not know; but it certainly was the first law of the Latins. It would be out of our way to do more than allude to the examples of this to be found in their politics, their economy, their religion, their jurisprudence: but equally valid proofs of it are to be found in their literature. In no single case did they borrow (as they were always borrowing) from the Greeks without drawing the reins tighter, discarding license, substituting a hard and fast rule for a discretionary alternative. Some of the results of this were, no doubt, lost in the centuries of disintegration: but enough remained to make French, when it emerged from those centuries, an almost scholastic language compared with English, and to impress on it a character which it has never lost. Only in these latter days have Frenchmen—greatly daring, and then under the censure of their authorities—ventured to break through such rules as that of the fixed caesura at certain parts of a line which we find in the earliest monuments of the literature, and that of the alternation of masculine and feminine rhymes which meets us almost as early. They have never to this day, except in mere unliterary song-writing, and in some recent and fantastic experiments, ventured to slur a syllable, or to neglect that mute *e* the value of which in French itself some Englishmen of great accomplishment

ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

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seem not even to suspect. And the interesting thing is that there is absolutely no period during the eight centuries of the existence of French as a literary language in which these characteristics do not appear. If the formative laws of French verse, and in a less degree of French prose, are not exactly the laws of the Medes and Persians which alter not, they deserve that description more thoroughly than the laws of any other literature of equal duration known to me. French constantly experienced foreign influences, indeed during the Middle Ages it may be said to have been to no small extent both inspired and written by foreigners. It went to school to Italian in the sixteenth century, to Spanish in the seventeenth, to English in the eighteenth. But so strongly fixed was it in the forms and moulds into which it was first run that it never experienced a sensible alteration of form. From time to time attempts not suited to the genius of the language were made, and they all died still-born. Even now, when the liberty of the Romantic movement has long diverged into all sorts of queer excesses, the spell is in full force, and neither M. Richepin nor M. Verlaine, nor even M. Moréas, can help reminding us constantly of the restrictions which as a Frenchman or a writer of French he underlies.

ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

Contrast this for one moment with our own literary history. So far has it been from being the case that the laws and forms of English have

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ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

resisted foreign influences in a similar way, that almost the only restrictions which we have ever obeyed, and those but partially, have been of foreign importation; and that we have thrown our own matter into them instead of subjecting their matter to our own form or absence of form. Even the sonnet's ribs of steel we made pliable, and in more complicated matters, such as the Classical tragedy, we refused again and again to bear the yoke because we could not shape it to our necks. It is, or used to be, the fashion to hold that during the "correct" period—the period of the influence of Dryden and still more of Pope—English did become in a manner formal; but the slightest examination will show to how small an extent this was the case. For the moment the stream ran small and low, and so it did not attempt to overpass the bounds which were set it; but with the first freshet they were all swept utterly away, and became as though they had never been. Just as France, constantly feeling foreign influences, has never expressed those influences in anything but a more or less French form, so England has constantly borrowed foreign forms, has bent and lissomed them after her own manner, and has uttered through them her own spirit—the curious, indefinable, incalculable spirit, which some short-sighted people call insular, but which is in effect and at its best microcosmic, possessing something in common with all parts of the world

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of mind, though as a whole more different from any of them than they are from each other.

ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

It is, however, particularly desirable to avoid rash language in connection with this matter of form: and I should like to bring our contrast before you a little more particularly under that special light. I have, to bring out the comparison in another way, just adopted the ordinary description of the lawlessness of English as contrasted with the strict formality of French. It is the truth, but not all the truth. In the sense in which French is subject to the reign of law, English is no doubt comparatively lawless, but in that sense only. I think that some, and even some great ones, have made a grievous mistake by sighing in this sense for change from lawlessness to law. When I hear these sighs I always think of a certain delightful verse of Peacock's :—

> But this you may know, that as long as they grow,
> Whatever change may be,
> You never can teach either oak or beech
> To be aught but a greenwood tree.

And English is one with its own greenwood trees in this respect. It will grow as it likes or not at all ; and if you try the *ars topiaria* upon it you will only make stunted abortions or playthings at the best, pretty enough, but obviously out of their kind and element. When a certain French poet undertook to teach poetry in twenty (or was it thirty ?) lessons he was not in reality uttering

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either a paradox or a bravado. Not only can a very great deal of what makes poetry in French be taught in lessons (the precise number does not matter), but what is much more important, the greatest poet in the world could not write good French poetry without such lessons given orally or by reading. No amount of genius will teach a man, except by pure accident, to break his twelve-syllabled lines at the sixth, and his ten-syllabled ones at the fourth syllable; to tip alternate, and only alternate, pairs of rhymes with *e* and so forth. Of such rules, of such form as this there is practically nothing in English verse or prose, both of which justify themselves by the effect, or not at all.

ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

In the same way, English is much more tolerant than French—if French can be said to be tolerant, and if English can be said to be intolerant—of peculiarities and neologisms of phrase. I know that there is just now a school of Frenchmen who are trying to break the intolerance down in France; and I know that there not only is, but always has been, a school of Englishmen who strongly object to the tolerance in England. I can only say that, as usual, I look at history and judge by it *securus*. All the greatest Frenchmen, with a very few exceptions, have been on the side of rigour; all the greatest Englishmen, with a very few exceptions, have been on the side of latitude. If I were a Frenchman, I should be the fiercest of purists; as I am an Englishman, I choose to follow

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with unequal steps the seven-leagued strides of Shakespeare and Dryden and the rest,

in taking a new word or a new construction, whenever it seems to me that the word or the construction is not intrinsically objectionable, that it is defensible by English analogy, and that it either supplies an actual want or furnishes a useful or ornamental alternative. But because I am thus for liberty in English, do I maintain that English has no forms of its own—that it is simply a case of "go as you please"? Most assuredly not. English is probably, if not certainly, a more difficult language to write really well than French; and it could not possibly be that if it were a mere "pidgin" dialect, composition in which were limited to the hanging together anyhow of a sufficient number of words to express the thought. It has its own forms, and very severe ones they are in their own way. But they are in some cases not easy, in others impossible, to formulate in the ordinary way and sense. They are something like those ancient laws of various peoples which were never written down, and which it was a sort of sacrilege to write down. They are transmitted by observance of the elders, by inference and calculation, sometimes as it were almost by an inherited and otherwise incommunicable instinct. A great Greek philosopher has been sometimes laughed at, and sometimes made a text to preach the weakness of philosophy, because he added to a definition, "and

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as the intelligent man would define it." That addition is essential to all our English laws and forms of literature. Where the Frenchman has a clear positive enactment which is to take or to leave, the Englishman finds only a caution "as the intelligent man shall decide," or "unless the intelligent man shall decide otherwise."

ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

It has always seemed to me that consideration of these points ought specially to affect the discussion of a question which is constantly being renewed in England (whether with entire seriousness or not it is difficult to say), the question whether a French Academy adjusted to the meridian of Greenwich would be a good thing for us. That question has been revived lately with increasing frequency, and it is particularly well suited to certain characteristics of public life to-day. On one side of the matter, the personal side, I need say nothing here. I have no doubt at all that we could get together a very respectable, not to say a brilliant Forty in England, and I have less than no doubt that some, at least, of those who were not included would be exceedingly angry at their exclusion. These things are incidental to Academies even in the countries where they exist. But an incident is not an essential. What I do not see is the good that the Academy is to do in England when it is got together. The good that it is to do, and to some extent does, in France is quite clear. The "Forty Geese that guard the

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capitol" (it is only fair to remember that that excellent jest was made by a goose who had failed of appointment as a guard) know exactly what they are appointed to do. They have to maintain the hard and fast rules to which we have already referred, to exemplify them in their own writing, to denounce the breach of them in others. Further, as even the hardest and fastest rules must sometimes admit of enlargement after a fashion, they have from time to time to signify certain relaxations and easements—not of the strictest form of French, for that is irrelaxable, but of what may be called the attitude of French official criticism—by admitting some innovator of undoubted genius or prevailing popularity to the charmed circle. They do this part of their duty a little less well than the other, but they do it fairly; and they do the other very well indeed. For you will observe that it is a duty which can be done by men not exactly of genius, almost as well as by men of genius, and perhaps even better. In the worst times, by the least distinguished of Immortals, provided only that the individual members are fairly educated and not in their rashest youth, the form-traditions of French, which are so clear and so valuable, can be observed and championed. In the best times, the very best writers can but exemplify them with additions, can but show how the greatest talent or even genius may put up with them and yet suffer no loss. The advantage of

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this is obvious: it is not metaphor, but simple expression of fact, to say that a French Academician is in the position of a French judge. He has a clear code to expound and apply; and he can hardly be so abnormally stupid or so abnormally clever as not to be able to do this. The danger is that the code should lapse for want of exposition and application. And that is what he exists to prevent, and what his mere existence, such as he must almost necessarily be, does prevent of itself.

ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

But how different is our state! I do not myself see how an English Academy could do any good, how it could even refrain from doing considerable harm, unless its members were, in positive and permanent majority, men of genius endowed with consummate judgment in the first place and with almost superhuman catholicity in the second. For we have no fixed rules to apply. We cannot take down a code and turn to article so and so, clause so much, with a certainty of finding that it meets the case in hand. Unless we could always count on a standing majority of men of genius, tempered in each case by judgment and sympathy, we should have mere stupidity dominant at one time, mere crotchet at another, mere exaggeration at a third. So far from having a fixed central exponent of the literary standard we should have ups and downs considerably worse than at present. We should not only neglect but

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crucify our Chattertons and our James Thomsons at one time: at another we should endow them all, Chattertons and others, for fear of accidents, at the public expense, to the intolerable annoyance of future generations. Now to maintain a standing majority of men of genius—of genius doubled with judgment and doubled again with catholicity—on such a board is, I should imagine, a very dangerous attempt indeed. Allowing for illness and accident, we must keep at least thirty such out of the forty. Are we prepared always to do so? Could any country that literary history tells us of have done so? Remember, they must be men who have produced and can produce masterpieces in their own kind, or they will not be respected. They must be able also to recognise masterpieces and promises of masterpieces in kinds the most different from their own. They must have at once the qualities of the Chief Justice and those of Falstaff. They must be academic and Bohemian, creative and critical, full of intense individuality, and full of catholic appreciation. I have a very high idea of the powers of my countrymen, but I think we might try them too high in setting them such a task. It has not been invariably achieved to admiration even in France, where the conditions of themselves facilitate success. Is it worth while trying it here, where they are such as almost to assure failure?

If we turn to another point of the contrast—

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a point which has been more than once mentioned —the contrast of spirit, we shall find ourselves on somewhat more perilous ground. The contrasts of outward form may be misinterpreted, but cannot be wholly missed. Yet as the poet says—

ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

> Soul is form and doth the body make.

And to the soul we must go. It is far harder and far more apparently presumptuous to attempt to sum up the spirit of a literature in a few words and minutes than in a few words to define its outwardly formal characteristics. It is especially hard in the case not of French but of English. Yet those whose minds have been long in contact with the two literatures are here even less than elsewhere likely to come to any serious disagreement about them. There are five pairs of opposites, or at least of differences, in the two which I think would be acknowledged by most such persons. The first is the *sobriety* of French, as opposed to that characteristic of English which presents itself to foreigners in the light which suggests to them the famous phrase "mad Englishman." The second, closely allied, is the predominant *wit* of French literature as opposed to the predominant humour of English. The third is the singular abundance of what may be called mechanical *inventiveness* in French balanced by the discursive imagination of the English. The fourth is the *clearness* and *precision* which seem to

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be wedded to the genius of the French language as opposed to our own proneness to the vague and obscure. The fifth is the prevalence of the *critical spirit* in French as opposed to a certain impatience of criticism proper which is extremely noticeable in English. Pray do not let these divisions of mine mislead anybody. I am not saying that all Frenchmen are witty, that all Englishmen are humorous (I wish to heaven they were!); that no Englishmen are witty, which would be conspicuously false, or that no Frenchmen are humorous, which would be, though very generally, by no means universally true. In the same way, no one of the other qualities mentioned is either universally present in the literature of the one nation, or universally absent in the literature of the other. But the division holds on the average of the two cases. And what holds still more strongly is that combination of these and other qualities which is present in the highest examples of each. Thus the French have never produced any man with that combination of sense of the vague, of imagination, and of humour which goes to make the very highest poetry; and I am not sure that we have ever produced any one with that mixture of sobriety, inventiveness, precision, wit, and critical spirit which goes to make the highest and most perfect prose. The difference is the same at the other end of the scale. It is almost impossible for a Frenchman to write such

ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

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bad prose as an Englishman writes easily and with joy; and though there is a strange characteristic about very bad poetry which makes all nations of the earth akin, I am not quite sure that an Englishman can write it quite so badly, with a badness so little relieved by mere absurdity, so little dependent upon technical faults, so sheerly, purely, hopelessly *bad*, as that which comes naturally to some Frenchmen. For the mere sound of English is poetical, while that of French (third parties, the only judges, will tell us this) is not; and so the English poetaster may blunder into a success, as the wandering and unconscious wind draws music from a harp. In French that is not to be done; and with the absence of art there is the absence of everything.

ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

Yet another set of differences arise almost necessarily from the combination of the results of these two; but they are not on that account less interesting. Although all languages more or less attempt, and attempt with more or less success, different kinds, still most of them, especially when they have such strong idiosyncrasies as the pair we are now surveying, devote themselves with peculiar success to this kind or to that. Of poetry proper we need say little, for what has been just said accounts for and disposes of it with fair completeness: but in prose and drama the case is different. With respect to drama I am not a very good judge, taking myself little pleasure in the

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theatre, and knowing little about it except that it incidentally produces some excellent and much execrable literature. I suppose we may not borrow from Marmontel his famous apology that the English succeed better in poetry than the French because their genius is more poetical. But I never could see myself why the countrymen of Shakespeare and Congreve and Sheridan should have to borrow plays even from the countrymen of Molière. Probably, however, that mechanical and orderly inventiveness of which we have spoken is at the bottom of it.

ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

In prose it is much plainer sailing. We should almost be prepared to find from the considerations already advanced, and we do find as a matter of fact that Englishmen excel in all the departments which border on poetry, while the French excel us in oratory, in a certain kind of history, and, generally speaking, in the exposition of clearly understood facts and theories. The superiority of literary hackwork in France is a commonplace, a truism, almost (I am myself inclined to think) what some ingenious person called a *falsism*. I have never been able to admit that the usual newspaper article in France, for instance, is better than with us, though it no doubt has a certain superficial air of superior order, logic (which is often desperately illogical), and general arrangement. But what in years of constant miscellaneous reading of books fresh from the press of both

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countries I have found, is the immense and extraordinary superiority of French as a medium for what itself calls vulgarisation—for what we call popularisation—of scientific and miscellaneous facts. Happy is the man—I do not say who wants to go deeply into a subject, but who wants to find a clear and not exactly superficial exposition of it, and who can find that exposition ready to his hand in French.

ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

Another universally recognised advantage is that which French has in the more properly literary department of aphorism, maxim-writing, and the like. The successful construction of such things in English is one of the hardest and one of the rarest exercises of our tongue; it is, if not one of the commonest and easiest, comparatively common and easy in French. And it throws a most curious and instructive side-light on those contrasts which we are discussing, that the writers who in English strive to make themselves remarkable by epigrams, *pensées*, aphorisms, and the like, are almost invariably driven to do it by manufacturing what may be called hard sayings. They feel the necessity of what some one has naïvely called "raising language [the language of Shakespeare and Shelley!] to a higher power." They make the natural vagueness of the language vaguer, they push to license its liberty of using words in new senses, they go more and more to the ends of the earth for strangely-matched

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metaphors and unexpectedly-adjusted images. The French maxim-maker, by an obvious instinct, does just the reverse. He clarifies yet further the natural clearness of his speech, avoids with yet more scrupulous care the juxtaposition of apparently incongruous images. The most wonderful of all examples of compressed thought which has yet perfect urbanity and lucidity of expression are the immortal maxims of La Rochefoucauld. He, with the other great writers of the same class who have followed him, has provided as it were so many different ready-made moulds of the *pensée* and maxim, that lesser men and women can run their own very inferior matter into these, and turn out something which at least looks like a *pensée* or a maxim with ease. Hardly a year passes without there coming fresh from the Paris press, some book of the kind, generally very prettily printed, often quite prettily written, and, if you read it without too much attention, reading not unlike the real thing. On the other hand, it is almost impossible even to translate such things into English at their best; and as for original writing of them, Englishmen, to do them justice, very rarely attempt it. When they do, it is still more rare that they achieve anything but rubbish pure and simple, or rubbish tricked and spangled up with strange tinsel of language. I am by no means sure that this is wholly or even to any considerable extent a proof of weakness in our

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language, though the opposite of it is certainly connected with the strength of French.

ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

These aphorisms and epigrams are almost always half-truths at most. The flash of them dazzles in the very act of illuminating, and I half think that the tendency to produce and to be satisfied by them accounts to some extent for, and is in turn to some extent accounted for by, that limitation and obtuseness of the acute and enterprising French mind which has been already glanced at. An epigram or an aphorism, like a dilemma, is in perpetual danger of what is technically called retorsion—a fact of which the person who delights overmuch in it is but too likely to take insufficient heed.

Whether there is much to choose between the languages in the matter of narrative is a long question to enter upon. There is, at any rate, very little doubt that we taught the French to write novels on more than one occasion. But instead of handling at any length the contrast of the English and the French novel, which might well afford a more than sufficient subject for treatment by itself, let us take it as part of a wider division of this sketch—the contrasts presented by the two languages as subjects respectively of study and of amusement. It is sometimes objected to French that it is, for a study, too easy: and I certainly should never myself dream of recommending it as a substitute for studies still severer in form, more prolific in initial difficulties, and

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presenting a more elaborate and yet simpler because preciser discipline. In plainer language, I would never consent to accept the study of French in lieu of the study of Greek and Latin. ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

But is any study, using that word in its proper sense, easy? I have tried many: I have found plenty of difficulty in all if only it be not deliberately avoided or carelessly ignored. The peculiar difficulty of French, even to some extent as a language but to a much greater extent as a literature, lies in the very fact that it looks so easy: that it looks so like English. There is an old joke about the surprise of the untravelled Englishman who lands at Calais and discovers that the people, despite their strange facility in speaking French, are very nearly human. I am inclined to think that the real danger is the other way. Only after a very considerable study of French life and French literature does one discover the deep and almost unfathomable differences which exist between them and the life and literature of England. We pride ourselves from time to time on the thought that Europe is getting more and more cosmopolitan, that nations are getting to understand each other better, and so forth. Are they? I doubt it very much. In ordinary experience, on the surface of politics, manners, letters, there may seem to be no great separation, but the cracks are like those very unpleasant natural fissures which widen as they go down. In many matters

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it is simply impossible to get a Frenchman even to understand the English point of view; and not much easier, though I think it is a little easier, to get the Englishman to understand the Frenchman.

ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

Now the finding out if not the reconciling of such differences, is one of the chief businesses and one of the chief benefits of the combined study of the two literatures. It is really a much more effectual way than that of residence in the two countries. For in the first place, it is very hard for a foreigner in either to get really what is now called in touch with the national life; and by as much as he does get in touch with it, by so much, infallibly and by the law of nature, does he get out of touch with his own people. In that silent companionship of the library which has been extolled by writers far too great for any wise man to attempt to rival their phrase, this difficulty disappears. La Bruyère does not put you out of touch with Addison, Swift with Voltaire, Corneille with Shakespeare, Balzac with Thackeray, Tennyson with Hugo. You do not become less an Englishman because you are familiar with French from the *Chanson de Roland* to the works of "Gyp," or less of a Frenchman because you are, as at least one French friend of mine is, and as I wish more Frenchmen were, familiar with English from Chaucer to Browning. You may not care—you might not be able if you did care—to exchange in either case your point

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of view for the other; but you are no longer unconscious of the two points; you can trace them in the past, you can to a great extent foresee them in given cases in the future, and above all you can understand them. There are few things in the world better than understanding, though there are many more common.

ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

Perhaps, however, enjoyment is not less good even than understanding, and here too the contrast of the two literatures heightens the benefit of them. There is, I believe, a notion, prevalent, though not quite so prevalent as it used to be, that there is something insincere, unnatural, impossible almost, in a liking for opposites and for things different from each other. I have never been able to share this notion myself, or to know why I may not admire A, because I admire B. On the contrary I should say that the admiration and enjoyment of A decidedly heighten the enjoyment and admiration of B by supplying perpetual foils, by bringing out in turn the excellences of each, and by softening the defects of each as it becomes clear that there are defects in the other. And it would be hardly possible to select, in the intellectual world, two subjects which perform this office of mutual correction and setting off so well as English and French literature perform it by dint of all the differences which we have been examining and many more. If there had really been a pre-established harmony in virtue of which each should

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ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

supply what the other wants, each should correct the other's faults, each should serve as a whet to revive the appetite jaded by the other, the thing could not have been better arranged. The two together form the veritable Cleopatra of literary love-making, whom no age can wither nor custom stale. I do not forget the charms of others, or the merits of others; I would not give up my reading of Greek or of Latin for any consideration; I would not be ignorant of German, or unable to make a shift to read Dante; I wish I knew more than I do of other languages still. But I cannot help thinking that for those whose circumstances do not permit them a wider range, it is absolutely impossible to find two literatures which, both for edification and delight, complete each other in so strange and perfect a way as these two.

If we have any intellectual advantage over the French (and being an exceedingly patriotic Englishman, I should be sorry to think we have not), it lies to no small extent in the fact that knowledge of French literature is far commoner in England than knowledge of English literature is in France. To be well read in French is no great distinction here; to be well read in English, whether it be regarded or not as a distinction in France, is an uncommonly rare accomplishment there. Many of my hearers must know and rejoice in the cleverest and most amusing of living French critics, M. Jules Lemaître. Now it is M.

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Lemaître's pride and pleasure to assert his ignorance of English; and though it is never quite safe to take such declarations too seriously, I must say that his remarks on English literature bear testimony to his absolute veracity. After which M. Lemaître permits himself to express unfavourable opinions about Shakespeare. There is nothing surprising in that. But what, if not surprising is really interesting, is that this flaw in M. Lemaître's equipment shows itself just as much in his remarks on his own literature, as in his remarks on ours. He is not alive to things in French, and he misconceives things to which he is alive, exactly in the way from which knowledge of English would, or might, have saved him. And so doubtless would it be with any English critic who presumed to be ignorant of French; he would make mistakes in reference to English itself, from which knowledge of French would have saved him. But English critics are not so brave as French; and I hardly know one who would confess such ignorance even if he dared to run the risk of it.

ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

Still we are not all critics, though, at the risk of seeing my own business overstocked or simply abolished, I am not sure that we ought not to be. At any rate we are all persons who have to live our lives, and who need take no shame in endeavouring to live them with as great and as varied an amount of honest and wholesome enjoyment

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as possible. And to that end, which I venture to think not in the very least a low or contemptible end considered from the point of view of any rational religion, philosophy, or æsthetic, I know no such adequate means on the intellectual side as the study of literature. It is not indeed at all times of life sufficient by itself, and I do not propose that it should be thought so. But it is, I believe, very rarely found to be successfully cultivated unless the cultivation begins pretty early and is pretty methodical. It does not interfere with the pursuit of other kinds of business, of pleasure, of duty—I rather doubt whether it is ever itself pursued with thorough success unless those who pursue it pursue the others too. But it has the great virtue of receiving us, if not into everlasting, yet into lasting habitations when the others fail. *Quelle triste vieillesse vous vous préparez!* said the great diplomatist and humorist who, as far as we can make out, made his last stroke of humour in leaving Memoirs more or less uninteresting, with tantalising precautions. He said it, as all know, to the person who was ignorant of whist. Far be it from me to speak of whist in any uncomplimentary fashion. But to play it satisfactorily you must get three other people, and those not the first comers; you must secure a place where whist is playable, and you must, at least that is my experience, make something of a business of it, and invest no small

ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

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capital of time, if not of money. You need do none of these things with literature.

ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

Books are cheap, and even those who cannot afford them can borrow them from libraries, though I own that for my part I cannot read with comfort any book that is not at least temporarily my own. They are infinite; they are unexacting; they can be taken up and put down at pleasure; they need no partner to secure their enjoyment; they interfere with nothing; they help everything. I would by no means oppose what some great ones have said about the excellence of desultory reading. But there is a certain charm also in filling out, not too methodically or slavishly, but with a sense of a definite end perhaps never to be reached but always to be aimed at, a certain scheme of reading. And that charm is, as it seems to me, infinitely increased by shaping the scheme so that it may include contrast and provide relief. For my part I have been and hope (Nemesis not interfering) to be a great reader, and I certainly would not limit myself to one or two literatures only. But what I should like to do before I die is to know as nearly as possible everything that is worth knowing in the two literatures of which we have been talking this evening. It is a large but not an impossible task, and I find as I go on with it that it is made not only vastly more interesting but also much easier by keeping one's eye, during the process, on the characteristics of the

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literatures as wholes; by endeavouring to see how each new book that one reads, be it of the twelfth century or the nineteenth, be it literature of power or literature of knowledge, confirms or modifies the general conclusions as to each which former reading has produced. It is quite possible that there may be some special attraction to a man whose main ordinary business is political and miscellaneous journalism, in this kind of subsidiary study, which at once carries one out of and corrects the merely ephemeral passages of the day. But I can see no reason why the comparative anatomy of the two literatures which I have found so satisfactory myself should not be equally satisfactory to others: and I can at least recommend it as one who has tried.

ENGLISH AND FRENCH LITERATURE.

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XI

A FRAME OF MINIATURES

I. PARNY

THERE is a pleasing legend which tells how Voltaire, during that visit to Paris which was his death, laid his hands upon the head of a very youthful poet who was introduced to him with no other remark than "*mon cher Tibulle!*" There are not too many sentimental legends about the patriarch, so that this one deserves all due honour. Parny, the dear Tibullus of the story, was a considerable figure in the French literature of the end of the last century, though he is now the shadow of a shade. Fontanes, the Halifax of the First Empire, declared him to be "le premier poète élégiaque français." Ginguené, a redoubtable critic, was good enough to inform his friend that "he first had made true love vocal." Chateaubriand, in the days before he was famous and ill-natured, had nothing but compliments for him. But it is to be feared that few Frenchmen and fewer Englishmen

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now read his elegiac triumphs, and that nobody, or next to nobody, reads the more doubtful works by which those triumphs were succeeded. The best of him is indeed to be found in a volume of selections, provided with an essay (his second on the same subject) by Sainte-Beuve. But Parny, if he is not exactly a king of men or of poets, deserves that now and then an opinion should be formed on him at first hand and from the whole of his work. That work is not, at least as it now exists, alarmingly extensive, and it has, what the work of some much greater men has not, a very distinct and often a very pleasant individuality.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. PARNY.

Parny was one of the rather numerous contributors with whom the French colonies, not otherwise productive of much profit or glory to the mother-country, have enriched French literature. He was born in the island of Bourbon in 1753, and died at Paris in 1814. By far the larger portion of his life was spent in old France; and his descriptions of the scenery of the Mascarene Archipelago are neither many nor particularly vivid. But his birthplace, for all that, made him what he was in literature. He was early sent to France to be educated; he took a transient fit of devotion, and then entered the army. But, while still quite young, he returned to Bourbon; and there he fell in love with a very young lady, whose literary name is Eléonore. Parny's biographers used to call her by the highly poetical title of Esther de

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Barf; but modern authorities will have it that she was a Mlle. Troussaille, Christian name unknown. The affair went to considerable lengths; but Parny's father refused his permission to the lovers to marry. The victim consoled himself after the manner of his kind. He wrote a volume of *Poésies érotiques*, which at once made him famous, and with which, after the manner of Mr. Pendennis and other verse-makers, he afterwards incorporated much verse originally addressed to other young ladies besides Eléonore, but now transferred to her. She married another; and Parny, finally quitting Bourbon, established himself in a rustic abode near Paris, where he lived very comfortably on his income and nursed his reputation.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. PARNY.

This life was disturbed by the universal disturber—the Revolution. That the poet thereby ceased to be Evariste Désiré de Forges, Vicomte de Parny, and became plain Citizen Evariste Parny, does not seem to have troubled him much. But his fortune suffered from the financial confusions of the time, and at last he found himself nearly penniless. A friend in high places gave him a post, which he did not keep long; and he then took seriously to literature. The chief result was the somewhat famous *Guerre des Dieux*. In spite of what Sainte-Beuve says, it is difficult to feel much admiration for this performance. It consists of the regulation (and by this time very stale) *philosophe* ribaldry at the expense of Christianity;

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the wit is very easy wit, and the thing had been much better done before—putting out of sight entirely the question whether it ought ever to have been done at all.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. PARNY.

It delayed its author's admission to the Academy for some time, but probably consoled him in his pocket. As Napoleon rose Parny's circumstances improved. As has been remarked, Fontanes, the literary adviser of the Emperor, thought highly of him, and he was pensioned. About the time of the projected English invasion he produced a very wonderful work of a patriotic character. This is entitled "*Goddam! Goddam!* par un French-Dog"; and the terrific irony of the title gives only a faint idea of its remarkable contents. It is a poem in four cantos, containing an allegory of the Norman Conquest. George III. appears as Harold; his sons under the not too obscure veils of Ansclare, Kyor, Cambrid, etc. The Ministers demand two hundred thousand guineas wherewith to corrupt Parliament, and, on the King demurring, point out that all prices have risen, those of members of Parliament with the rest. The English army marches under the conduct of familiar spirits, such as

L'adroit Robbing, Cheat sa facile sœur.

Ansclare bombards Dieppe, and valiantly defeats several French fishermen. A Duchess (of Devonshire) kisses a *savetier*—a slight variation on the English form of the legend. At last the decisive

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battle is fought. The hired Scotchmen behave well, but the English troops, gorged overnight with

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. PARNY.

Le lourd pudding et le sanglant rostbeef,

make a miserable show. Their few valiant chiefs—

Le pesant Thorthenthron,
Le froid Cranncraft, le triste Whirwherwhon—

are slain, all the Royal princes run away, and at last Harold, hotly pursued, and in search of an asylum, leaps the gates of Bethlehem Hospital, handsomely relinquishes his crown, and disappears with the words

J'aime les fous et je reste à Bedlam.

It would, I think, require a wide search through literature to find a parallel to this extraordinary production, written by a man of such talent as Parny's. That talent, however, was distinctly on the wane by this time. He addicted himself to the writing of epics, put forth a poem called *Les Rose-Croix*, which is quite unreadable, and occupied himself towards the close of his life with two still longer poems of a less respectable nature. The first was entitled *Les Amours des Reines de France*, and he wisely burnt it. The other was an extension of the *Guerre des Dieux* into a *Christianide*, the manuscript of which is said to have been bought by the Restoration Government, careful of the morals and religion of its

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subjects, for thirty thousand francs. Can anybody name a European Government in the present day which is prepared to give twelve hundred pounds for the manuscript of an anti-Christian poem?

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. PARNY.

All this later work is a mere excrescence. Parny's claims as a poet rest upon his four books of *Poésies érotiques* and upon a certain amount of miscellaneous work of a similar kind. The reader of these at the present day may at first, but only at first, find their phraseology artificial, their ideas trite, their passion sentimental. Before he has turned a very few pages he will, if he be in the habit of critically reading poetry, begin to understand why Parny appeared to his contemporaries an apostle of naturalism and freshness. There is no attempt at innovation of language, and little at rejection of the commonplaces of the time, the sighs and the flames, the *Cythères* and the *myrtes*, and all the rest of it. But these artificial things are somehow used naturally, and not as if they were artificial, while the undefinable air of simple grace which is over the whole is felt at once. Let us take his most famous piece, the following:—

VERS SUR LA MORT D'UNE JEUNE FILLE

Son âge échappait à l'enfance;
Riante comme l'innocence,
Elle avait les traits de l'amour.
Quelques mois, quelques jours encore,
Dans ce cœur pur et sans détour
Le sentiment allait éclore.

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Mais le ciel avait au trépas
Condamné ses jeunes appas.
Au ciel elle a rendu sa vie,
Et doucement s'est endormie
Sans murmurer contre ses lois.
Ainsi le sourire s'efface ;
Ainsi meurt, sans laisser de trace,
Le chant d'un oiseau dans les bois.

Only a few of the writers of the Greek Anthology and of our own seventeenth-century epitaphists have reached such simplicity and grace in treating such a subject. The poet's more amatory style is difficult to illustrate, because, though this part of his work is harmless enough, it has a decidedly creole warmth of colouring, and because, short as are most of the poems, they are yet somewhat too long for quotation. The following very short extract must suffice :—

DEMAIN

Vous m'amusez par des caresses,
Vous promettez incessamment,
Et vous reculez le moment
Qui doit accomplir vos promesses.
" Demain " dites-vous tous les jours
L'impatience me dévore ;
L'heure qu'attendent les amours
Sonne enfin, près de vous j'accours :
" Demain " répétez-vous encore.
Rendez grâce au Dieu bienfaisant
Qui vous donna jusqu'à présent
L'art d'être tous les jours nouvelle ;
Mais le temps, du bout de son aile,
Touchera vos traits en passant ;
Dès *demain* vous serez moins belle
Et moi peut-être moins pressant.

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A FRAME OF MINIATURES. PARNY.

Both these extracts have been chosen rather to show Parny's power of managing the simplest and most ordinary language than to exhibit his command of colour and imagery. His work, however, is very far from deficient in these latter respects. A series of tableaux, entitled *Les Déguisements de Vénus*, are admirable of their kind, and deserve, now that tapestry has come again into fashion, to be wrought out therein. *Le Voyage de Céline* is a pleasant tale in verse, and the injurious remarks made in it by a negro who for the first time beholds European beauty are excellent. But we must fall back on the elegies and a few detached poems to Eléonore for Parny's most enduring contribution to literature. He belongs, of course, to the school of the bards of light love, of whom there are so many. Their song in too many cases becomes insipid to generations whose mode of expression is different from theirs. But Parny has special saving gifts. These are, in the first place, his admirably limpid style and the sweet attractive kind of grace of which he is a master; in the second, the real tenderness, not to say passion, which pervades his work. He has neither the occasional insincerity and tinkle of Moore, nor the pedantry which sometimes mars our otherwise supreme amatory verse of the Caroline period, nor the monotony of Johannes Secundus, nor the wearisome stock metaphors and cut-and-dried emotions of the French school from Chaulieu to Dorat. It

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may be that he only seems a child of nature when compared with these latter. But, if he be not altogether a child of nature, he is the child of a very admirable art, limited, indeed, and intermittent in its application, but at its best more than sufficient to give him his passport to at least a minor kind of immortality. The immortality he enjoys is, it is to be feared, of an exceedingly minor kind. But as long as any lover of poetry takes the trouble now and then to recur to his work, so long will the true ring be found in him, amid much that is false and much that has for those who are not his contemporaries absolutely no sound, whether false or true. Chénier is the fashion and Parny is not, yet there are notes in Parny which Chénier never succeeded in sounding on his elaborately Grecian lyre.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. PARNY.

II. DORAT

All who know anything of the French literature of the last century know that the Philosophical Church was not much more tolerant of dissenters and free-lances than the elder and more august institution. Those who were not sealed of the tribe of François-Marie had to lay their account with a good deal of detraction, a vast amount of sneering, and occasionally some virtuous indignation, which

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at this distance of time seems to us not a little ridiculous. Among the men of letters who refused to be ranked among the *philosophes* was the pleasant versifier whose name stands at the head of this section. Dorat, though by no means a man of strait-laced morality, and not inclined to be violently orthodox, was too easy-going, too little given to thinking on serious subjects, and at the same time, we may perhaps say, too sensible to join the army of the enemies of *L'Infâme*. He did more than keep aloof from them; he occasionally presumed to attack them; and he had his reward. It became the fashion to sneer at him as a literary trifler. Lebrun, the best representative of Pindar which eighteenth-century France could lay its hands on, called him "Le ver luisant du Parnasse." Galiani, the wittiest and wickedest of all the Philosophic tribe, remarked of his charmingly illustrated books, "Ce poète se sauve du naufrage de planche en planche." Grimm, or some one of Grimm's contributors, informed him that he was "a canary." Dorat did not trouble himself much about these assaults; and, in his "Épître aux grands hommes des coteries," showed himself to be possessed of good wit and of better sense than his enemies. The opening lines are worth quoting:—

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. DORAT.

> Écoutez-moi, mes chers amis,
> Je n'aurai pas le ton sévère.
> Soyez (si cela peut vous plaire)

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Lumineux, profonds, érudits.
Régnez par vos calculs hardis
Sur la peuplade littéraire.
De Pétersbourg jusqu'à Paris
Tendez le filet salutaire
Où vont se prendre les esprits.
Que la clarté se développe
Avec chacun de vos pamphlets,
Qu'elle étonne par ses reflets
Tous les aveugles de l'Europe.
Faites galoper vos agens,
Extirpez les erreurs funestes ;
Mais, pour Dieu, soyez bonnes gens
Et si vous pouvez, plus modestes.

It would not be easy to hit off the pretensions, the fussiness, and the foibles of the missionary Philosophers with, as Cowley somewhere says, "a more gentlemanlike correction."

Claude Joseph Dorat was born in 1734 and died in 1780. He belonged to a family of some position and wealth, and expressly disclaimed descent from his quasi-namesake, the teacher and member of the Pléiade. After trying the Bar, and serving for some time as a mousquetaire, he betook himself definitely to literature, and made even his enemies confess that he at least possessed industry. Although he died a comparatively young man, his works fill twenty volumes, containing examples of almost every style of literature that the time admired. He began, of course, with tragedy, and the collaboration of Crébillon the elder did not save *Zulica* from qualified damnation. Dorat, however, was not in the least discouraged

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—discouragement, indeed, seems to have been an unknown feeling with him—and during his life he produced a baker's dozen of tragedies and comedies, into which the inquisitive may be earnestly dissuaded from looking. But he was very far from confining himself to the drama, and indeed if he had done so, he would not be worth writing about. Nor do his prose efforts (romances sometimes in the fairy style of the younger Crébillon, and sometimes made up of long chains of letters) deserve much more attention. *Les Sacrifices de l'amour*, *Les malheurs de l'inconstance*, *Volsidor et Zulmiane*, are hardly worth turning over, even for the sake of their illustrations, by which, according to Galiani's spiteful but appropriate pun, Dorat's books are generally saved. His real *forte* lay in the direction of light poetry of the kind which Voltaire had made fashionable, with an occasional echo of Chaulieu and his followers, or even of older work.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. DORAT.

Dorat's special mania was the epistle. There is hardly any end to his verse-letters. Sometimes they bind themselves up in bundles as in the case of a deplorable "Chanoinesse de Lisbon." More often they are detached, and of these detached epistles the number and the subjects are infinite. Dorat and Mr. Toots would have entertained a sincere sympathy for one another. The poet sends epistles to Voltaire, to Hume, to every noteworthy personage of his time;

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he writes "To an atheist," "To a comet," "À la raison d'un homme qui n'en a pas." Had it occurred to him, he would certainly have written an epistle to Things in General. Besides these *Épîtres* he has odes, epigrams, songs, fables, verse-tales and every conceivable variety of occasional poetry. His fortune, which was fair, enabled him to bring out his books in a delightfully coquettish dress, and upon the illustrations of one alone he is said to have spent thirty thousand livres. The titles correspond to the dress. *Les Baisers* is indeed borrowed, as well as its contents; but *Mes Fantaisies*, *Mes Nouveaux Torts*, and so forth, are more original, and in their way not less pleasing. Unfortunately for Dorat the sale of his books by no means recompensed him for these extravagances, and for the similar but still more costly fancy which he had for gorgeously equipping his worthless plays. He got rid of most of his fortune, though it does not appear that he was ever in uncomfortably embarrassed circumstances. At last, and before very long, it was time to die. He was warned of his danger and proceeded to make preparations for it in a style which, from all that we hear of him, seems to have had about it less bravado than childish whimsicality. He had his hair dressed and powdered, arrayed himself fully, and shortly after expired upon a sofa "en corrigeant une épreuve." Of all the queer variations of "Meum est propositum" that are on record,

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. DORAT.

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certainly this is the queerest. I do not think that literary men of twenty years' standing usually regard the correction of proofs as an ideally delightful employment.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. DORAT.

It will be sufficiently obvious from what has been already said that Dorat can only be enjoyed by persons of a certain catholicity of taste, and by those persons only when they are in the mood. If Dresden china, minuets, powder, and so forth, are distasteful, Dorat will be distasteful too. If they are not distasteful, Dorat will be able to supply very appropriate music to accompany the entertainment. He is absolutely destitute of passion; indeed, it may be said that he does not even attempt it. One of his best things is a letter to a young lady—"Qui me proposait d'aller passer un mois avec elle"—and who seems to have been sentimental enough to recommend the country for the place of the joint sojourn. Dorat suggests the disadvantages of the proceeding in language which Célimène, under similar circumstances, would have been thankful for. But while there is thus no passion in him, and hardly any sentiment, he has not a few compensations. He is invariably good-humoured; he is rarely cynical in his good-humour; and though he sometimes tried hard to attain to the fashionable indecency, he was quite unable to make it rude or offensive. His best verse, too, is extraordinarily light and sparkling. "Les Vendanges de Vénus" is remarkable for the manner

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in which the short verses catch up and, so to speak, return the quick music of the song. In this French lyric poetry is apt to fail, the grave harmony of the Alexandrine having so deeply stamped itself upon the whole prosody of the language that it is difficult to get rid of it. If Philine had known this song, it is probable that she would have sung it, and William Blake must surely have had it in his head when he wrote a certain vigorous epigram about "age and sickness." Of this sort of sparkling verse there is not a litfle scattered about Dorat's twenty volumes. Here for instance is an almost perfect example of the *lestement enlevé* kind, not in the least shocking in the language of its day and generation, whatever it may be now :—

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. DORAT.

Que pour Bacchus ou pour L'Amour
On fasse une partie,
Que ce soit de nuit ou de jour
J'en ai d'abord envie !
J'ai toujours soif, j'aime sans fin
Rouge et blanc, brune et blonde ;
Je voudrais boire tout le vin
Et baiser tout le monde !

A poet who more absolutely demands the aid of the selector could hardly be found. Yet the original volumes have, as has been before remarked, a special charm of their own. No one who has read them fails afterwards to associate in some inextricable manner the light and fluttering verses with the illustrations so bountifully scattered about them. These illustrations, in the earlier volumes

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chiefly by Eisen, in the later by Marillier, are admirable examples of the charming *taille douce*, the secret of which the eighteenth century seems to have carried off with it. In the fables, for instance, every poem has its headpiece illustrating the subject, and besides this an elaborate tailpiece, which may or may not directly concern the poem, but which is always delicately conceived and admirably drawn. Sometimes it is a Cupid paying attention to a hooped and powdered damsel in a "cabinet of verdure," sometimes a bouquet of roses and myrtles and all the flora of Venus, sometimes a conventional pile of masks and scutcheons and armour, but always something attractive and fanciful. The frontispieces, as usual, are simple, but especially careful in style.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. DORAT.

All this forms a very pleasant and seductive framework and scenery for the Parnassus in which Dorat, according to his enemies, performs the undignified functions of glow-worm and canary. All I can say is that uglier birds than canaries, and insects very much more offensive than glow-worms, have sometimes found their way to the holy hill. When the contemporary critics were in a good humour they admitted that, if Dorat was an imitator of Voltaire, he was at any rate the best of such imitators. I should be inclined to say that in some respects he was less an imitator of Voltaire than was thought, at a time when it was matter of breviary

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that Voltaire had tried every style and was unsurpassable in all. In mere wit, of course, the comparison would be absurd. But Dorat has made a closer approach to really lyrical versification than his master. Voltaire's verse, admirable as it is in some ways, usually deserves the reproach, from which so little French poetry from Malherbe to Lamartine can escape, that it is Alexandrines cut up into lengths, and it very seldom possesses the springing and bounding movement of which Dorat, as has been shown by example, was capable.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. DORAT.

To keep up the zoological metaphors with which his enemies treated him, no poet was ever more of a butterfly than Dorat. But butterflies in fine weather and in suitable surroundings are pretty enough to look at.

III. DÉSAUGIERS

In the extremely interesting autobiography which Béranger has left us he gives an account of his own convictions at the beginning of his career as to the necessity of some alteration in the style of French song-writing. The old themes were completely worn out, he says, and the old treatment of them had ceased to be acceptable. A people who had made the Revolution had risen above tales of "tricked husbands, greedy lawyers, and

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Charon's bark." One cannot be too grateful to any theory which led to the writing of "Dans un grenier qu'on est bien à vingt ans" or of the "Chanson des fous." Nor is it necessary to inquire too deeply whether, as often happens, the poet, writing long after the events, did not attribute to formal reasoning and system the results of instinctive taste and sometimes of accident. It is sufficient to say that the implied censure of the style of song-writing prevalent in his own youth is amply justified. Of that style Désaugiers was the last, the most finished, and the most popular representative. Even after Béranger there have never been wanting in France persons who lament the innovations of the later singers, and who sigh for the more artless and Gallic strains of the good-natured president of the *Caveau*. "Désaugiers c'est la chanson" somebody has said, with the ineffable satisfaction at summing up the matter neatly which only a Frenchman can feel. Apparently, then, we have only to examine Désaugiers to discover the essence of what has been sometimes held up as a specially French form of composition.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. DÉSAUGIERS.

He was born in 1772 at Fréjus, of a musical and literary stock. His father was a composer of some note, his elder brother wrote operas and plays in considerable numbers, and though the younger brother betook himself chiefly to the graver ways of diplomacy, he left some literary remains. Marie-Antoine-Madeleine, the second

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son, was very early distinguished as a general favourite. A benevolent bishop wished to make an abbé of him; but Désaugiers was not long in deciding that he had no vocation; and, indeed, about the same time the Revolution made the professional prospects of an abbé none of the brightest. Such political sentiments as he had were decidedly Royalist, and he was glad of the opportunity given him, by the marriage of his sister with a colonist, to leave France. In San Domingo he again showed himself master of *l'art de plaire*, until, unluckily for him, the negro revolt broke out. He was captured by the rebels, and was within an ace of being shot. Escaping this fate, he embarked for the United States. But his bad luck pursued him. On board ship he sickened of some disease which was mistaken for yellow fever, and the terrified sailors unceremoniously put him ashore. Forlorn and destitute, he was taken in by a lady, who nursed him till he recovered. Philadelphia rather than New York was then the chief resort of strangers in the United States, and there Désaugiers for some time maintained himself by giving lessons on the pianoforte. He did not, however, remain long in America. The worst days of the Revolution were past, and Paris was an irresistible attraction to a man of Désaugiers's temperament. Thither he accordingly returned.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. DÉSAUGIERS.

From this time to the end of his life his chief occupations were theatrical, the writing of the

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songs by which his name is now preserved being mainly an amusement. He wrote, chiefly in collaboration, about a hundred vaudevilles, *féeries*, parodies, and similar dramatic trifles, which are only distinguished from the general run of such things by the greater abundance and better quality of the *couplets* which abound in them. After a time he was made director of the Vaudeville Theatre, and managed it with considerable success, notwithstanding his easy-going temperament. He was one of the most popular personages of his day, though, like most men in such a position, he was sometimes anonymously attacked, opinion being kind enough to father some of the attacks on Béranger. Perhaps, however, his most important post was the presidentship of the celebrated *Caveau*. This convivial society, originally founded in the second half of the last century by Gallet, a grocer who ought to have saved his fellows from the obloquy attached to their name, survived for more than a century in the form of a club which later generations have accused of displaying very little of the jollity of its ancestors. The life of the *Caveau*, however, has been far from continuous, and there have been not a few breaks in its history. In the second and third decades of this century, under Désaugiers, it was in the height of its glory. The devotion of most of its members to Bacchus was by no means merely conventional, and Désaugiers was one of the most ardent of the

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. DÉSAUGIERS.

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devotees. As is the case with most professedly gay persons, stories are told of his uneasy melancholy when he was not under the influence of company and wine. He paid the penalty usual with the seekers of artificial paradises. Symptoms of calculus showed themselves as he grew older, and in 1825 he succumbed to an operation which had become necessary.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. DÉSAUGIERS.

Désaugiers has in one sense a really historical interest. He is perhaps the last literary specimen of the skipping, grinning, and shrugging type which our good grandfathers used to associate with the idea of a Frenchman. Large portions of his work depend for any comic effect that they have, or ever might have had, upon the pantomimic gestures by which they are intended to be accompanied. Thus in one case the singer is directed to yawn and stretch his arms all through the song. Another resource of his is the affixing of refrains of the *pan-pan, zic-zoc* order to his verses. In yet a third class, and it is one of the largest, provincialisms are the means resorted to to raise a laugh. Cadet Buteux is a blockhead who goes through all sorts of experiences, and then gives an account of them in jargon. Even Frenchmen at the present day do not seem to find any great fund of amusement in such verses as—

> Depuis longtemps j'avions le cœur tout en cendres
> Pour les appas d'mam'selle Manon Giroux.
> Nous v'là fiancés. . . . J'lis *Les deux gendres*
> J'm'dis, "gna qeuqu' mariage là-d'sous."

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A FRAME OF MINIATURES. DÉSAUGIERS.

It is quite easy to understand that songs of this kind, sung in good character after dinner, might obtain applause; but it is not easy to understand how any literary merit can be thought to be discernible in them. It is true that Désaugiers does not always rely on such means of obtaining a laugh. He has passages of simple Epicurean lyric which are far from bad of their kind, such, for instance, as the following:—

MORALITÉ

Enfants de la folie,
Chantons;
Sur les maux de la vie
Glissons;
Plaisir jamais ne coûte
De pleurs;

Il sème notre route
De fleurs.
Oui, portons son délire
Partout;
Le bonheur est de rire
De tout.

Pour être aimé des belles,
Aimons;
Un beau jour changent-elles,
Changeons.
Déjà l'hiver de l'âge
Accourt;

Profitons d'un passage
Si court;

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L'avenir peut-il être
Certain ?
Nous finirons peut-être
Demain.

The matter of this is trivial enough, but its manner is light and brisk, and not destitute of a certain music. Another successful style with Désaugiers was the proverb-song, in which some well-known maxim serves as a refrain. His work in this line seems to have been more serviceable to Béranger as a model than any other; and admirers of the greater singer may trace some resemblance to his *faire* in these verses of the lesser :—

TOUT CE QUI LUIT N'EST PAS OR

Pour une chanson nouvelle
J'invoquais mon Apollon,
Quand je vis à ma chandelle
Se brûler un papillon ;
Et cet incident tragique
M'inspira, sans nul effort,
Ce refrain philosophique :
Tout ce qui luit n'est pas or.

Sans argent, sans espérance
Figeac plaignait son destin.
" Hé ! morgué ! d'la patience,"
Lui dit Pierre, son voisin ;
" L'soleil luit pour tout le monde."
Il luit, j'en tombe d'accord,
Mais lorsque l'estomac gronde
Tout ce qui luit n'est pas or.

Dans mille pièces mesquines
Qu'un jour voit s'évanouir,
Costumes, décors, machines,
Tout est fait pour éblouir ;

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Mais au bout de la quinzaine
La baisse du coffre-fort
Prouve au caissier qu'à la scène
Tout ce qui luit n'est pas or.

Quand une Agnès se dit riche,
Quand un fat vante son nom,
Quand un médecin s'affiche,
Quand une belle dit non,
Quand un voyageur bavarde,
Quand un Anglais se dit lord,
Mes amis, prenez-y garde :
Tout ce qui luit n'est pas or.

These two pieces are perhaps as good short specimens of Désaugiers as can be found ; and, though they may show that he exerted some influence on Béranger's style and versification, they show still more clearly how great an advance his pupil made upon the manner, the subjects, and the general tone of the master. It was this tone which Marchangy charged Béranger with altering and spoiling by the introduction of political and other burning topics into the hitherto peaceable region of the *chanson*. Readers may judge of the justice of the charge and of the reasonableness of the regrets which have sometimes been expressed in France at the alteration. "Mais à présent c'est bien fini de rire" is no doubt a lamentable reflection ; but, if the laugh can only be kept up by such unreal means as those which Désaugiers resorted to, perhaps it might be as well to cry for a change. In some of his longer and narrative pieces he displays, indeed, the usual French faculty of telling a tale

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pleasantly, and with a certain pleasant slyness. But on the general run of his songs hardly any more favourable verdict can be pronounced than this—that the best of them would be fair impromptus for a convivial meeting, and that the worst of them are at about music-hall level in point of wit, if not of vulgarity.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. DÉSAUGIERS.

Nor must it be thought that this is merely the opinion of Englishmen, enemies of gaiety, eaten up with moroseness and spleen, and apt to depreciate the excellences which they cannot comprehend. The view of Désaugiers which I have taken is decidedly less unfavourable than that of M. Hippolyte Babou, a Frenchman of Frenchmen, and one who specially devoted himself to the light literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. "Rien de moins gai au monde," "inanité," "fadaises," "ton glacial," "Boufflers d'arrière-boutique," are some of the stones which, in spite of a somewhat ghastly punning prayer of Désaugiers or somebody else, M. Babou flings at the harmless president of the French "Cave of Harmony." In this judgment there is perhaps some harshness. But it is not to be denied that Désaugiers is somewhat dreary reading at the present day. He was, unluckily for himself, born just too early or too late, and the Revolution did not do him the favour which it did to many of his contemporaries, the favour of cutting off their heads, so that they could not make anachronisms of themselves. Désaugiers

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was certainly an anachronism. With Lamartine and Chateaubriand in full force, with Victor Hugo "mewing his mighty youth," with Courier, and Lamennais, and others, adjusting themselves in this way and that to the new order of things, he went on imitating in *falsetto* the tones of Collé and Panard, tones always more or less false, but in his time jarring hopelessly with all around. Worse than all this, too, was the existence of a contemporary, not many years his junior, who had seen and grappled with and triumphed over the difficulties which he himself ignored or shirked. It is, however, that contemporary who gives Désaugiers his interest. It is very seldom critically permissible to regard any author merely as a foil to another; but the temptation to do so is irresistible in the case before us. The true value of Béranger can hardly be estimated without some knowledge of his immediate forerunner.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. DÉSAUGIERS.

IV. VADÉ

It is sometimes rather irritating to lovers of English literature who happen to be also lovers of French, to perceive what a much better fate French authors of the second or third class have than our own in the matter of reprints. Even our great classics are not always too accessible to those who cannot hunt up original editions; and as for the

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lesser stars, most of them may be said to be hardly accessible at all. In France, on the other hand, the three great collections of MM. Didot, Charpentier, and Garnier supply for a few francs copies of almost all French authors of any eminence since the middle of the seventeenth century, with a good many of earlier date; while the innumerable *éditions de luxe* which MM. Lemerre, Quantin, Jouaust, and others, not to mention the Bibliothèque Elzévirienne, have supplied during the last thirty or forty years, extend the list to almost every author, not merely of eminence, but of any considerable literary and personal interest. It is certainly a curious contrast that, taking names almost at random and as they occur to the memory, we should have no full modern editions of Otway, of Green—Spleen-Green—or of Anstey;[1] while in the course of four years two careful and elaborate reprints of the author whose name stands at the head of this article appeared in France. In 1875 M. Julien Lemer made an excellent, though unpretentious, selection of Vadé for the Garnier collection. In the spring of 1879 "ce polisson de Vadé" (as Voltaire, with exceeding injustice, used to designate him) had the honour of making the first of a sumptuous little collection of eighteenth-century poets, published by Quantin.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. VADÉ.

[1] These three names require no change at the end of thirteen years, though there has been a certain amount of rather unsystematic reprinting among us meanwhile. [1892.]

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This volume, however, pretty as it is, is not nearly so full or so characteristic as the earlier selection.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. VADÉ.

Vadé is one of those authors who have a real interest, and even a real importance, in literary history, for reasons not directly concerned with the intrinsic merit of their works. In the first place, the history of his reputation is a very curious one. He had for a time a great vogue, and that vogue ceased chiefly as a consequence of the unceremonious borrowing of his name for the purpose of fathering work of greater merit than his own. Voltaire, as we have noticed, was wont to mention him with anything but respect, his crime being the unpardonable one of friendship and association with the detested Fréron. But no sooner was he dead than Voltaire took his name, and set it to some of his own best productions. The *Contes de G. Vadé*, and, still more, the famous *Pauvre Diable*, helped, by their attribution to a certain non-existent Guillaume and his equally non-existent cousin Catherine, to obscure the fame of the authentic Jean-Joseph; and Voltaire's example raised up a whole family of pseudonymous Vadés, who performed the same ungrateful part of sometimes eclipsing and sometimes throwing discredit upon the personage to whom they owed their name. Except that his works continued to be republished, and that he retained a vague celebrity as the inventor of the *genre poissard*, Vadé passed

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pretty well out of literary cognisance. It was even long before he reaped the benefit of the nineteenth-century tendency to rummage the cupboards and waste heaps of the past for curiosities. Until quite recently his best chance of being read was the fact of the existence of an exceedingly beautiful edition of him, printed "on grey paper," but by no means "with blunt type," at the very best period of the Didot press, and embellished with lovely tinted illustrations. *Madame Angot* and M. Zola between them helped to resuscitate him, the argument being apparently that the *langue verte* of one day is as interesting as the *langue verte* of another, while in Vadé there is at least plenty of fun, no horrors, and no morbid pseudo-psychology to spoil the enjoyment of him.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. VADÉ.

Jean-Joseph Vadé was a Picard, and was born at Ham in 1719. He died at Paris in 1757, so that his life, if a tolerably merry one, was also decidedly short. He was an incorrigible dunce in his youth, but before very long showed a talent for verse-writing. A series of small employments in the Revenue Department at last landed him in a tolerably comfortable sinecure at Paris, where he thenceforth lived. It was not long before he began to write comic operas and other light pieces for the stage; and his scraps of song, either in these pieces or published independently, soon made him a popular favourite. One of Voltaire's charges against him is that to him was due the famous and

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unlucky surname of Bien-Aimé, which was conferred upon Louis XV. at the time of the temporary dismissal of Mme. de Châteauroux; and the accusation at least shows that Vadé was popular. Like most of the song-writers of the eighteenth century, he was strongly Royalist; attachment to the monarchy and hatred of the English being the obligatory stock-in-trade of a chansonnier who wished to please at once the people and the police. But Vadé's private character, from the point of view of the easy-going morality of the time, was far from bad, and the term *polisson* is certainly an injustice. Even the censorious and uncharitable Collé, who, in the journal which he was secretly keeping, registered every peccadillo of his friends, expressly describes Vadé as "un galant homme qui a des mœurs et de l'honnêteté." It is not known what induced him to take to the *genre poissard*, but it is certain that he imitated no one in so doing. The market-women of Paris had long been famous for freedom of tongue, and it had been there, as elsewhere, an occasional amusement with idle men of fashion to visit the Halles and attempt to bandy compliments with them. But Vadé seems to have been the first to attempt, on any large scale, the presentation of their dialect in literature. His experiments in this way took various forms. His principal work is a mock-heroic poem entitled *La Pipe cassée*, in which it is told how an estimable person named La Tulipe

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. VADÉ.

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had an invaluable and beautifully coloured pipe broken in his efforts to restore peace between his enraged womankind. Next to this in importance come *Les Quatre Bouquets poissards*, telling the unhappy fate of a lover who, with the harmless design of buying a bouquet for his mistress, has to run the gauntlet of the flower-sellers' satire. Many of Vadé's comic operettas are also written in the same language. But perhaps the best of his work is to be found in the *Lettres de la Grenouillère* and in the *Déjeuner de La Râpée*, both of which are mainly in prose. The personages of the first work are M. Jérôme Dubois, fisherman, and Mlle. Nanette Dubut, laundress, and the letters are written with a very charming delicacy and at the same time with great naturalness and truth of touch. Delicacy is not the prevailing characteristic of the other work mentioned; but in vividness and quaint nature it is quite the equal of the Grenouillère correspondence. Nor is all this work so frivolous as it appears at first sight. Vadé does not merely aim at surprising his patrons with something strange, and tickling them with something indecorous. He has a real sympathy with his subjects, a sympathy which breaks out in such lines as those in which he describes his fishwives, who

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. VADÉ.

> En gueulant arpentent Paris
> Pour aider leurs pauvres maris.

It is this sympathy, no doubt, which gives value

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to his work and renders it interesting in spite of its apparent frivolity and sometimes of its unworthiness. Of form and culture Vadé had little or nothing. One of his favourite styles was the *amphigouri*, a variety of nonsense-verse to which the earlier eighteenth century was very much addicted, and which consisted mainly in an assemblage of the most incongruous names and things arranged so as to give plenty of startling rhymes, thus :—

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. VADÉ.

Alaric
A Dantzic
Vit Pégase,
Qui jouait avec Brébeuf
Au volant dans un œuf
Au pied du mont Caucase,
Etc. etc. etc.

Perhaps this nonsense is better worth quoting than it seems, for it may be remembered that the eighteenth century had not a monopoly of the taste for literary follies. Vadé, however, is no doubt the lightest of all the foam bubbles that were flung up before the great torrent dashed over the precipice of the Revolution. "On ne ressuscite pas la gaieté, qui n'est que gai," some one has said, and the phrase certainly applies to Vadé. His *poissarderies* are hardly suitable for quotation. In his other work it is only now and then that one comes across a lively and well-expressed passage like the following :—

Je suis un Narcisse nouveau,
Qui s'aime et qui s'admire ;

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Mais dans le vin et non dans l'eau
Sans cesse je me mire.
En y voyant le coloris,
Qu'il donne à mon visage,
De l'amour de moi-même épris
J'avale mon image.

He left behind him, besides these vain and light compositions, a daughter as vain and as light as they are. Mlle. Vadé was for a moment one of the stars of the Comédie Française, a star, however, who appears to have shone rather by her personal gifts than by any great success in her art. She died, it is thought, before she was five-and-twenty, everything that owed its origin to Vadé being apparently as short-lived as it was graceful and popular.

Vadé, however, has a real importance in the literary and social history of the eighteenth century. It was he who, in however frivolous a manner and for whatever unworthy purposes, first brought up into the notice of the cultivated and fashionable world of Paris the actual thoughts, speech, and manners of the lower classes. Literature even in its least constrained moments had for nearly a century been always in full dress. Every man of letters had talked or tried to talk *en marquis*, and when an alternative was wanted to Versailles, it was found only in the hopelessly unreal Arcadia peopled by the models of Sèvres and Dresden. Vadé's boatmen and laundresses, fishwomen and *forts de la halle*, were studied from nature, even if the studies were caricatured. For

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half a century at least, from the flourishing of Chaulieu to the flourishing of Bernis, all light poetry had been utterly and of malice prepense artificial. Vadé's strains were, at any rate, natural. Nor does it seem to be a far-fetched explanation of his apparently fanciful choice of style to connect it with the general uprising of the wider and more popular sympathies which were shortly to show themselves in the social and political theories that in their turn led to a terribly practical revolution. From the *poissardes* of Vadé to the *poissardes* of '93 is a long step ; but it was in *La Pipe cassée* and *Les Bouquets poissards* that the idiosyncrasies of the working-men and working-women, with whom their children were destined later to make so terrible an acquaintance, were first introduced to the world of marquises and great ladies, of tax-farmers and drawing-room abbés. Here, as in other instances, Samson made sport for the Philistines for some time before he exhibited his powers as other than a sport-maker. It is something to have been master of the ceremonies on the first introduction of two such classes to each other, and this position at least "ce polisson nommé Vadé" may claim.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. VADÉ.

V. PIRON

The author of *La Métromanie* is one of those

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literary persons of whom everybody knows one thing, and hardly anybody knows any more.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. PIRON.

> Ci-gît Piron, qui ne fut rien,
> Pas même Académicien,

is familiar to thousands of readers who have no idea whatever of the history and other writings of the witty epigrammatist, or whose further knowledge, if it exists at all, is limited to his only famous comedy. Among those few, too, who have taken the trouble to inform themselves further, there is a very considerable difference of opinion as to the merits of the "machine à saillies," as Grimm termed him. One class of critics (including, it must be confessed, names of the greatest weight) is inclined to see in the Burgundian poet little more than a wilful offender against decency, and a spiteful Ishmaelite of the pen, whose errors are barely here and there redeemed by witty sallies and pointed raillery. Another class reverses the arrangement, and regards Piron as something of an eighteenth-century Rabelais, whose sins are more than atoned for by the humour and *verve* of his style and sayings. In this case, as in many others, it is necessary to look narrowly at literary records, in order to appraise properly the judgments which literary historians have passed, for there is no branch of history in which second-hand opinions are so readily accepted and so persistently handed on. When we remember that Piron was emphatically a free-lance, that he scandalised the

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orthodox at the same time that he lampooned the philosophers, that while he wrote thirty-two epigrams on Fréron and fifty-four on Desfontaines he was little more sparing of his irreverent criticisms on their great opponent, it becomes clear that we should accept opinions about him with a good deal of caution. On the face of it the author of the epigram-epitaph cannot have been a dull man; and the uncle who, when his niece had clandestinely married, and had kept the secret, fearing his displeasure, made over the greater part of his property to her in solemn form, beginning "Je lègue à Nanette ma nièce, FEMME DE CAPRON," with the words *femme de Capron* in capitals, cannot have been an ill-natured one.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. PIRON.

Alexis Piron was born at Dijon on the 9th of July 1689, and died at Paris in 1773. It does not appear that he entertained for his native city any of the enthusiasm which a Dijonnais of this century, the admirable and unfortunate Louis Bertrand, has expressed; but his father, Aimé Piron, was a zealous Burgundian, and showed his provincialism, if the term may be allowed in a new and more favourable acceptation, in more ways than one. He wrote a good deal of verse in *patois*, especially *Noëls*, a Burgundian form which La Monnoye, the well-known commentator on Old French, made famous. Alexis very early showed himself to be a son of his father in the possession of a tendency to rhyme. He showed, too, the

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curious mixture, or rather alternation, of piety and profanity which afterwards characterised him. One of his earliest preserved poems is purely devotional in character and very earnest in tone ; another is of so scandalous a kind that it was perpetually brought up against him, and excluded him from the Academy. He was educated for the law, but seems to have had little affection for it, and at length he wandered to Paris and drifted into literary work of one kind or another. At first he undertook the dreary and ungrateful task of "buckwashing" the bad verses of a nobleman. Soon, however, he displayed a certain dramatic talent. Piron was one of those literary men who are better at *tours de force* than at regular work, and it was a *tour de force* that brought him into notice. The jealousy of the Comédie Française had procured an edict whereby the Opéra Comique was restricted to a single actor speaking on the scene. This remarkable relegation of theatrical conditions to their earliest form completely nonplussed the usual writers, including even Lesage, and the manager, in a despairing state, appealed to Piron, whose offers to write he had previously refused. Piron gave him *Arlequin-Deucalion*, which was completely successful. He did not limit himself to work of this kind, but transgressed into regular tragedy and comedy, in which walks he had, with the exception of *La Métromanie*, no great success. His reputation, however, was high.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. PIRON.

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A FRAME OF MINIATURES. PIRON.

The Academy, indeed, shut its doors to him, earning thereby an unceasing shower of the bitterest and best epigrams in the language. But the King and many noblemen were his liberal patrons; and he seems, at any rate during the last half-century of his life, to have been very well off.

His private life was chiefly led in two different circles, both interesting in their way. He was a member of the first Caveau, sharing its chief honours with Gallet, Panard, Crébillon fils, and Gentil-Bernard. He also had a kind of feminine *cénacle*, which recalls, as others of his characteristics also recall, some particulars of the life of Swift. Piron's feminine allies were Mlle. Quinault, an actress, and Mlle. de Bar, companion to the Marchioness de Mimeure. The former was beautiful and witty; the latter, witty and ugly. After twenty years of friendship Piron married Mlle. de Bar, and tended her with unfailing gentleness during an attack of mental disease which soon came upon her, and which killed her at last. Mlle. Quinault's affection does not seem to have been altered by the marriage, and the poet continued to be on the best terms with her. In their correspondence, prose and verse, Piron is Binbin; she is Tonton; her cousin, Mlle. Balicourt, is Bouri, and so forth; while benevolent patrons, like the Count de Livry and the Count de Saint-Florentin, make occasional appearances. To the outer world, however, Piron was very far

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from being amiable, and very few of the prominent men of letters of the day escaped his sting. One of his chief abominations was Nivelle de la Chaussée, the inventor of *Comédie larmoyante.* Two of Piron's hits at this personage are worth quoting. The first is in allusion to the frosty welcome given to a piece of the victim's :—

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. PIRON.

Chaleur subite
Faisait trop vite
Pousser les blés ;
Monsieur Nivelle
A dit " Qu'il gèle ",
Il a gelé.

The second explains itself :—

Connaissez-vous sur l'Hélicon
L'une et l'autre Thalie ?
L'une est chaussée, et l'autre non,
Mais c'est la plus jolie.
L'une a le rire de Vénus,
L'autre est froide et pincée ;
Honneur à la belle aux pieds nus ;
Nargue de *La Chaussée!*

Here is one of his innumerable assaults on the Academy, the chief merit of which is the mock gravity given to it by a slight archaism of language :—

En France on fait, par un plaisant moyen,
Taire un auteur quand d'écrits il assomme.
Dans un fauteuil d'Académicien,
Lui quarantième, on fait asseoir cet homme.

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Lors il s'endort et ne fait plus qu'un somme.
Plus n'en avez prose ni madrigal.
Au bel esprit ce fauteuil est, en somme,
Ce qu'à l'amour est le lit conjugal.

Very admirable, too, is his summary of the tedious process of reception. Says the novice, "Monsieur, grand merci"; replies the director, "Monsieur, il n'y a pas de quoi." The stories of his sharp sayings are infinite. Once, it is said, in one of his curious fits of piety, he attended the levee of the Archbishop of Paris, who, wishing to be gracious, asked him, "Avez-vous lu mon dernier mandement, Monsieur Piron?" Whereto the poet replied, "Et vous, Monseigneur?" Even better known is the legend of his listening to a poem full of plagiarisms which some aspirant insisted on reading to him. At each reminiscence he solemnly lifted his hat, until at last the author, nettled, asked him what was the matter. "C'est que j'ai la coutume de saluer les gens de ma connaissance," was the reply. One can fancy how that young man loved Piron ever after; and, in truth, a great majority of his acquaintances in the literary world had something of the kind to quicken their affection for him. When he died, we are told that only Diderot, of all the men of letters in Paris, attended his funeral. The fact is characteristic of Diderot; characteristic also of Piron's popularity.

There have been three or four reprints of selections from Piron of late years; and at the appearance of one of these the *Revue des Deux*

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Mondes asked whether a reprint of him could be said to be called for. If the question be decided with reference to the actual material value of the work reprinted, the answer might perhaps be negative. But good French, good wit, and good style can never be obsolete. The inspirations of the author of *La Métromanie* were almost always purely occasional, and the occasions were by no means always of the worthiest. But in his manner of availing himself of them there was much of the specially French merits which distinguished the best literature of the eighteenth century. The sharp crispness of language, the admirable concinnity of expression, the strong and straight-flying (if too often spiteful) wit that directed and accompanied his sallies, are not perhaps at the present day so frequently or so invariably found in his successors as to make the representation of this model superfluous. It was Piron's misfortune that he lived at a time when there was not much employment for occasional literary talent which had no particular vocation, and that his incurably *frondeur* spirit excluded him from the ranks of the *philosophe* party, the only one which had anything like a common object and a serious purpose. Born fifty years later, he would have been a formidable rival to Chamfort and Rivarol in the war of sharp sayings which preceded the Revolution. Born a hundred years later, he would have been an ideal journalist of the lighter kind, and might have made in his

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. PIRON.

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A FRAME OF MINIATURES. PIRON.

own way a reputation equal to that of Paul Louis Courier or of Benjamin Constant. As it was, he devoted himself avowedly to nothing, and nothing has rewarded him in its own way. The following verses are the extended form of the famous epitaph which he himself compressed into a distich for the benefit of short memories :—

Ci-gît . . . Qui ? Quoi ? Ma foi ! personne, rien.
Un qui vivant ne fut valet ni maître,
Juge, artisan, marchand, praticien,
Homme des champs, soldat, robin ni prêtre,
Marguillier, même Académicien,
Ni frimaçon. Il ne voulut rien être,
Et véquit nul : en quoi certe il fit bien ;
Car, après tout, bien fou qui se propose,
Venu de rien et revenant à rien,
D'être en passant ici-bas quelque chose.

Unfortunately in the case of those "qui ne veulent rien être" posterity, not altogether unreasonably, is a little prone to take them according to the letter of their desire. Epigrams may be good things to temper despotisms with, but they are themselves a somewhat untempered mortar wherewith to build a durable reputation.

VI. PANARD

An essayist who should not fear to touch the titles of Charles Lamb might perhaps take a worse subject than the decay of drinking-songs. For

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the last half-century it would be difficult to find any instance in the more prominent literatures of Europe of a Bacchanalian poet, and the instances of those who have recently tried to make themselves exceptions to the rule are rather more convincing than the silence of the majority. The *maladie du siècle* does not seem to have had any unfavourable effect on the consumption of fermented liquors, but it certainly has interfered with their poetical celebration. Perhaps nobody now requires to be lyrically converted to the faith of Bacchus; perhaps nobody has a sufficiently genuine belief in that faith to celebrate it. Certain it is that neither in English nor in French has the worship of the *dive bouteille* been poetically fertile of late. The last considerable man of letters in England who produced genuine drinking-songs was, I suppose, Peacock. Even he, however, had ceased to write them for many years before his death. *Gryll Grange* contains no drinking-song to match its admirable "Love and Age"; *Crotchet Castle* even has but one snatch, though a noble one; and if we want genuine stuff of the kind, we must go back to *Maid Marian* and her elders. It is true that Thackeray's *Ballads* contain certain exhortations to conviviality, the poetical merit of which no one will contest. But these are rarely, if ever, pure anacreontics, and the charm of "The Mahogany Tree," of "The Age of Wisdom," and of the close of the "Ballad of Bouillabaisse" is due at least as

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. PANARD.

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much to their melancholy as to their mirth. It may be laid down that no one in England whose youth came much later than the days of the Regency has had the secret of this sort of composition; in France it is very doubtful whether anybody born since the Revolution has had it.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. PANARD.

This peculiarity of our time makes us look with something more than merely antiquarian interest on poets who have in good faith given themselves up to this extinct variety of poetry. Such a one, and a remarkably typical representative of the class, was Panard, the chief singer of the first Caveau, whose glass (holding a full bottle of claret) is to this day religiously preserved by the society which inherits the title, whose practice was fully commensurate with his theory, and whose character appears to have approached with remarkable closeness the ideal of an anacreontic and epicurean bard. Panard was none of the hypocrites who chant Bacchus under the inspiration of toast and water, and exhort their friends to be merry over a captain's biscuit; nor was he, as far as at this distance of time it is possible to discover, in any way hypocritical in his affectation of *joyeuseté*. He kept no malicious diary in secret, like Collé, jotting down the weaknesses and misfortunes of his friends; he carried on no war of epigrams with the world at large, like Piron; he had even, it would seem, no moments of depression and ἐωλοκρασία like his successor Désaugiers. He

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lived in peace and charity with all men and women, consumed a vast quantity of more or less good wine, and yielded in his turn a vast quantity of more or less good verse.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. PANARD.

Panard was a native of Chartres, and, like his friends Collé and Piron, was a long-liver, despite his addiction to conviviality. He was born in 1694, and did not die until 1765. The earlier part of his life seems to have been spent in some small Government appointment; for the necessities of the latter part a few of his friends, themselves by no means rich, provided by a subscription the proceeds of which were invested in a small annuity. Seldom indeed was there a more popular person than Panard or one whose necessities were less pressing. Marmontel, who, though a very much younger man, knew him well, has left a full description of his way of life. His abode was the humblest of garrets, almost unfurnished. A bed, a couple of chairs which served for a wardrobe when his scanty stock of clothes was not on his back, and a wig-box, appear to have made up the total. This wig-box served him as a treasure-chest, just as Campbell used to use his slippers for a similar purpose, only that Campbell's treasures were authentic bank-notes, and Panard's were pieces of verse written on bits of paper very much stained with wine. When Marmontel, in his capacity of editor of the *Mercure*, wanted something for his Poet's Corner, he used (he tells

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us) to go to Panard, and was invariably told to "look in the wig-box," where he took his choice.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. PANARD.

Everybody seems to have been fond of the burly songster, whom, as one of his critics has ingeniously said, "somebody set running, and the tide of song flowed on till the cask was empty." A member of the Caveau, he was the only dissentient when the too severe morality of that convivial assemblage turned out the grocer Gallet for the crime of usury. "M. Gallet est prié de dîner les dimanches partout ailleurs qu'au Caveau," ran the remarkable invitation or prohibition which, it is said at Crébillon's dictation, expressed the wishes of the Club. But Panard was faithful to his friend, even when he had had losses and was repenting his usury in the Temple. He divides with Vadé the doubtful honour of having dubbed Louis XV. "Le bien-aimé," and in his case, at least, posterity has been content to accept the proceeding as a proof merely of innocence and not of servility. Like almost all his friends, he wrote for the stage, and, liberally as he has for the most part been judged, his critics have been obliged to confess that he was not a great dramatic poet. But his comic operas and such like pieces are remarkable for the abundance and the quality of the songs and verses with which they are interspersed. It does not appear that any complete edition of Panard has ever been published;

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and, unlike most of his friends, he has not yet profited by the reprinting mania. There is a very pretty four-volume edition of him issued about the time of his death, and another printed some forty years later by the chansonnier and vaudevillist Gouffé; but neither of these is at all exhaustive. Nor is Panard a person who calls for a complete edition. On the other hand, he very well deserves, and is specially fitted for, the process of judicious selection, which, so far as I know, he has not yet received.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. PANARD.

The chief thing to be remarked about the unpremeditated verse which Panard poured out in vast quantities, and apparently without effort, is its spontaneous and genuine character. The sentiments may be false or conventional, but there is a sincerity of conviction about the singer which is not to be mistaken. When Panard says,

> Il n'y a rien sur la terre
> De si bon ni de si beau que le verre,

he says an absurdity, no doubt, and not a very novel absurdity either; but of his individual belief in the proposition there can hardly be any doubt. There is a quaint epigram of his which in anybody else's mouth might seem only an ingenious conceit. It runs thus:—

> Tout passe, amis: tout passe dans la terre.
> Ce sont du ciel les ordres absolus.
> Tel qui voit du vin dans mon verre
> Dans un moment n'en verra plus.

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A FRAME OF MINIATURES. PANARD.

Evidently the poet has just been struck, practically, by this painful application of the law that nothing endures. Not Mr. Browning himself feels more keenly the inability of the soul's and the body's hand-palms to keep one good fair wise thing just as they clasped it. In all the line of anacreontic bards Panard perhaps is the only one in whom this absolutely genuine tone is to be found. He does not sing, or drink, or sing about drinking because it is the proper thing to do, or because he has some ingenious notions that can be brought in, or for any other reason of the kind, but solely because he believes what he says. Hear him, for instance, in the following song, which displays a very remarkable science both of verse and rhyme :—

J'ai toujours, Bacchus,
Célébré ton jus.
N'en perdons pas la coutume.
Seconde moi,
Que peut sans toi
Ma plume ?
Coule à longs traits
Dans mon épais
Volume.
Viens, mon cher patron,
Sois mon Apollon,
Viens, mon cher ami ! Que j' t' hume !

Grâce à la liqueur
Qui lave mon cœur,
Nul souci ne me consume.
De ce vin gris
Que je chéris
L'écume !

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Lorsque j'en boi
Quel feu chez moi
S'allume !
Nectar enchanteur,
Tu fais mon bonheur ;
Viens, mon cher ami ! Que j' t' hume !

Champagne divin,
Du plus noir chagrin
Tu dissipes l'amertume.
Tu sais mûrir,
Tu sais guérir
Le rhume.
Quel goût flatteur
Ta douce odeur
Parfume !
Pour tant de bienfaits
Et pour tant d'attraits
Viens, mon cher ami ! Que j' t' hume !

Here is a less quaint and artificial arrangement of rhyme which, however, is not without its charms :—

J'aime Bacchus, j'aime Manon,
Tous deux partagent ma tendresse :
Tous deux ont troublé ma raison
Par une aimable et douce ivresse.
Ah ! qu'elle est belle. Ah ! qu'il est bon !
C'est le refrain de ma chanson.

Quand le vin coule dans mon cœur
Et que ma mignonne est présente,
Je ressens une vive ardeur
Et dans un doux transport je chante,
Ah ! etc.

Nanette en me brûlant d'amour
Me rend le vin plus agréable ;
Le vin par un juste retour
La rend à mes yeux plus aimable.
Ah ! etc.

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En partageant ainsi mes vœux
  Mon cœur en est plus à son aise ;
Quand il me manque l'un des deux
  L'autre me soulage et m'appaise.
Ah ! etc.

De Manon si j'avais le cœur,
  Lui seul pourroit me satisfaire,
Mais ses refus ou sa rigueur
  Me rendent le vin nécessaire.
Ah ! etc.

Des maux qu'elle me fait souffrir
  C'est ce nectar qui me délivre.
Vingt fois elle m'a fait mourir,
  Vingt fois Bacchus m'a fait revivre !
Ah ! etc.

Here, again, is an epigram, than which many worse have found their way into anthologies, old and new :—

Lorsque le chantre de la Thrace
Dans les sombres lieux descendit,
On punit d'abord son audace
Par sa femme qu'on lui rendit.
Mais bientôt par un justice
Qui fit honneur au dieu des morts,
Ce dieu lui reprit Eurydice
Pour prix de ses divins accords.

Marmontel called him " le La Fontaine du Vaudeville," and, bold as is the appellation, it is perhaps not destitute of appropriateness. Panard really had, and did not affect, the curious mixture of simplicity and wit which distinguished his more famous predecessor. His funeral discourse on the

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unfortunate Gallet, to whose tomb he had been paying a farewell visit, is an instance. "Ils me l'ont mis, monsieur," said he to a sympathising acquaintance who met him in the street, and inquired the reason of his evident disquietude; "ils me l'ont mis sous une gouttière! Lui qui depuis l'âge de la raison n'a pas bu un seul verre d'eau!" It would be an entire misconception of the character of the man to see in this the sort of ill-timed joke that Chamfort or Rulhière might have made. It is exactly the idea which might occur to anybody, but which no one but a child would express without some malicious intent.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. PANARD.

There are, of course, different estimates of the value of childishness in full-grown men. Panard, however, is at least interesting as the last genuine specimen of it in a literature where its manifestations had once been many. In other contemporary singers there is, indeed, *insouciance*; but it is *insouciance* which has been the subject of a great deal of *souci*. They say, "I don't care about getting into the Academy, not I," and they proceed to prove this by laboriously attacking, with Piron, in a hundred epigrams the institution which is beneath their notice. They say, "I was born gay," and they keep with Collé a private journal written, not with ink, but with pure gall. There is nothing of this about Panard. His heaven is, indeed, a somewhat curiously

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placed heaven, for it is to be found in a well-stocked cellar. But no believer in the most mystical of religions could celebrate his belief more assiduously or with a more cheerful and unhesitating devotion.

A FRAME OF MINIATURES. PANARD.

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XII

THE PRESENT STATE OF THE ENGLISH NOVEL, 1892

IN discussing the state of the English novel at a time which seems likely to be a rather exceptionally interesting one in the history of a great department of literature in England, it will probably be as well to make the treatment as little of a personal one as possible. Reviews of the *personnel* are in some cases allowable, and are at times not uninteresting: but they are rarely desirable, except when something like ignorance of it is presumable in the reader. When the survey is presented in a form which aims at a certain permanence they are better omitted, and so far as I have availed myself of anything formerly written on the present subject, or subjects akin to it, I have weeded out almost entirely anything like personal and individual reference. An exception or two to this may be found, but they shall be exceptions which certainly do not infringe the rule. In regard, I

THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

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think, to most living practitioners of the craft, it will be more than possible—it will be a very great advantage—altogether to avoid either naming examples or expressing like and dislike for them.

THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

[1] [For the question happens not to be one of liking at all, still less one of ranking novelists, old and new, in order of merit. It is one of setting in order, as well as may be, the chief characteristics of the English novels of the day, and of indicating, with as little rashness as possible, which of them are on the mounting hand and which are on the sinking. And for my part, and in the first place, I do not see any reason to think the reappearance of the romance of adventure at all likely to be a mere passing phenomenon. For the other kind has gone hopelessly sterile in all countries, and is very unlikely to be good for anything unless it is raised anew from seed, and allowed a pretty long course of time. In more than one sense its state was and is (for it still flourishes after a sort) less perilous with us than elsewhere. The habits and public opinion of the nation have kept us from that curious scholasticism of dull uncleanness on which too many French novelists spend their time. There is still too much healthy beefiness and beeriness (much of both as it has lost) in the English temperament to permit it to indulge in the sterile pessimism which seems

[1] From this point to p. 399 the substance of this essay appeared, with some variation, in the *Fortnightly Review* for 1888.

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to dominate Russian fiction. When we come to the comparison with America, we are getting on very delicate ground. Perhaps the best way of putting the difference is to recall a pleasant observation of Thackeray's, in his remarks on Maginn's *Maxims of O'Doherty*. O'Doherty laid it down (though for himself he thought it "nonsense") as a maxim of fashionable life, that you were to drink champagne after white cheeses, water after red; and Thackeray rejoined very truly that fashionable society did not trouble itself whether you did both, or neither, or either. Now America, a little young at "culture," is taking her literary etiquette books very seriously and trying to obey their minutest directions; while Englishmen, whose literary breeding is of an older stamp and tolerably well established, do not trouble themselves about it at all. For my part, I have said before that I think some of my friends are very hard on Mr. Howells when he makes those comic little critical excursions of his, of which, my prayers having been heard, he has since made a most valuable and instructive collection. Your virtuous beginner always plays the game with surpassing strictness, and is shocked at the lax conduct of oldsters.

THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

In England we have escaped the worst of all these things even yet: though we have been drawing nearer and nearer to them. Half a score at least of writers possessing gifts which range

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from very considerable talent to decided genius, and perhaps not less than half a thousand possessing gifts ranging from very considerable talent to none at all, have elaborated, partly by their own efforts and partly by following the great models of the last generation, a kind of mixed mode of half-incident, half-character novel, which at its best is sometimes admirable, and at its average is often quite tolerable pastime. We are still curiously behindhand in the short story, the *nouvelle* properly so called, which is not a *märchen*, or a burlesque, or a tale of terror (these three we can sometimes do very well). If there is any falling off, the determined optimist may remember the mercies which tempered the domination of the Campaigner to poor Mr. Binney. If we have cut off the cigars we have considerably improved the claret; or in other words, if we have lost some graces, some charms of the finest and rarest kind, we have greatly bettered the *average*—(I must be pardoned italics here)—the average structure and arrangement of the average novel. How weak a point this has always been with our great novelists, at any rate since the beginning of this century, everybody who has studied literary history knows. Scott never seems to have had the slightest idea of what was going to happen, or how it was going to happen, though as a matter of fact it generally did happen delightfully if irregularly enough. Dickens is supposed to have been very careful

THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

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about his schemes, though if any man can explain to me what the plot of *Little Dorrit* is; why Mr. Tulkinghorn chose in that entirely irrational and unprofitable manner to persecute Lady Dedlock; why anything, no matter what, happens as it actually does happen in *Hard Times*; and what the sense or meaning of Estella's general conduct is in *Great Expectations*, he will do more than I have ever been able to do for myself, or than any one else has yet been able to do for me. Thackeray's sins (if in novel-writing it be not blasphemy to say that Thackeray sinned at all) are gross, palpable, and, for the matter of that, confessed by the sinner. In particular, if any one will try to arrange the chronology of the various Pendennis books, and if his hair does not turn white in the process, he may be guaranteed against any necessity for a peruke arising from similarly hopeless intellectual labour. Of course these things are usually very small faults. But they are faults, and I think that, on the whole, the tendency in average novel-writing during the last twenty years has been to correct them. Again, the average writing of the said novel is decidedly better, and, generally speaking, a distinct advance has been made in the minor details of craftsmanship. There are one or two popular writers, and many not yet popular, who still sin flagrantly in the old direction of taking fair pains over the first and the third volumes and flinging to the public the slovenliest botch

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of a second that it is likely to tolerate. But this want of literary conscience and literary self-respect is much rarer than it used to be, and appears to be regarded, by younger hands especially, with proper disgust.

THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

Nevertheless I do not think, much as I respect many of its individual practitioners, that the English novel of the day in its average form is a work of art which ranks very high. In the first place, though it has for many years almost wholly devoted itself to character, how many characters has it produced that will live, that will accompany in the memories of posterity the characters of the masters of the past? Very few, I think. We read its books often with pleasure, and sometimes with admiration, at the moment, but they add little to the abiding furniture of our minds and memories. And here let me guard against an objection which is obvious enough, that a man furnishes his mind pretty early, and by the time he comes to forty has no room left. I do not find it so. I have within the last few years, within the last few months, read books for the first time whose characters I am quite certain I shall not forget till I forget everything. Nor am I short of memory, for, as far as mere facts go, I could give plenty of details of many novels published in the last twenty years and more. But very few indeed of their characters and their incidents and stories have taken rank with Partridge at the theatre, with

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Habakkuk Mucklewrath's dying denunciation of Claverhouse, with Elizabeth Bennet's rejection of Darcy, with Esmond breaking his weapon before Beatrix's princely lover, with Lavengro teaching Armenian to Isopel Berners, with Amyas flinging his sword into the sea. I must confess also that I hold a creed which may seem to some people, perhaps to most, irrational and even childish. I do not think that there is exactly the same amount of genius and of talent always present on the earth, but I do think that in the blossoming times of the intellect the genius and the talent are pretty constant in their total amount. If you get the sum spread widely about you get the kind of work which is now abundant, and nowhere so abundant as in the novel. Of the immense numbers of novels which are now written, a very large proportion cannot be called in any true sense bad, and of the still considerable number which are written by our best men there are few which may not be called in a very real sense good. The great models which they have before them, the large rewards of successful writing, and (for why should not a man magnify his own office?) the constant exposure and reprobation of the grosser faults of novel-writing on the part of critics,[1] have brought about a much higher general

[1] At the same time I must admit that I could not undertake to teach the complete art of novel-writing in so many lessons. I was obliged once to confess as much, to a very amiable person who, in

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level of excellence, a better turn-out of average work, than was ever known before. But, either from the very fact of this imitating and schoolmastering, or from sheer haste, or what not, we do not seem to get the very best things.

THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

Undoubtedly, therefore, the return to the earliest form of writing, to the pure romance of adventure, is a very interesting thing indeed. We do not want here a detailed criticism of the books which have shown it. The point is, that in all the writers have deliberately reverted to the simpler instead of the more complicated kind of novel, trusting more to incident, less to the details of manners and character. I hold that they have done rightly and wisely. For the fictitious (as distinguished from the poetic) portraiture of manners and the fictitious dissection of character deal for the most part with minute and superficial points, and when those points have been attacked over and over again, or when the manners and characters of a time have become very much levelled and mannerised, an inevitable monotony and want of freshness in the treatment comes about. This seems to have been the case more or less in all European languages for a long time past.

consequence of a critique of mine, sent me a cheque with an agreeable apology for its not being larger, and a request for more of that excellent advice. It was not possible to keep his cheque; but I have always thought that he must have been a very nice man. As a general rule authors do not send such documents to their critics; you may go a long way "without a cheque" on that road.

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Except in the most insignificant details, manners have altered very little for the last half-century — a stability which has not been a little increased by the very popularity of novels themselves. A boy or girl now learns manners less from life than from books, and reproduces those manners in his or her own fresh generation. The novel has thus "bred in and in," until the inevitable result of feebleness of strain has been reached. But the incidents, and the broad and poetic features of character on which the romance relies, are not matters which change at all. They are always the same, with a sameness of nature, not of convention. The zest with which we read novels of character and manners is derived, at least in the main, from the unlikeness of the characters and manners depicted. The relish with which we read the great romances in prose, drama, and verse is derived from the likeness of the passions and actions, which are always at bottom the same. There is no danger of repetition here; on the contrary, the more faithful the repetition the surer the success, because the artist is only drawing deeper on a perennial source. In the other case he is working over and over again in shallow ground, which yields a thinner and weedier return at every cropping.

THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

But it will be said, Are we to have nothing new? Are we simply to hunt old trails? Whereto I reply with a *distinguo*. A time may possibly

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THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

come, may be near at hand, when some considerable change of political or social life may bring about so new a state of manners, and raise into prominence as an ordinary phase so different a side of human character, that the analytic novelist may once more find ready to his hand new material. This in its turn will grow stale, just as the ordinary middle-class person, fairly educated and acquainted with the novelists from Scott downwards, is now getting stale in all European countries, even in those which, like Russia and America, seem as if they ought to have plenty of virgin soil to cultivate. And then that generation, whether it is the next or the next after, will have to return as we are doing to the romance for something fresh. For the romance is of its nature eternal and preliminary to the novel. The novel is of its nature transitory and is parasitic on the romance. If some of the examples of novels themselves partake of eternity, it is only because the practitioners have been cunning enough to borrow much from the romance. Miss Austen is the only English novelist I know who attains the first rank with something like a defiance of interest of story, and we shall see another Homer before we see another Jane. As for what we often hear about the novel of science, the novel of new forms of religion, the novel of altruism, and Heaven knows what else, it is all stark naught. The novel has nothing to do with any beliefs, with any convictions, with any

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thoughts in the strict sense, except as mere garnishings. Its substance must always be life not thought, conduct not belief, the passions not the intellect, manners and morals not creeds and theories. THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

Its material, its bottom, must always be either the abiding qualities or the fleeting appearances of social existence, *quicquid agunt homines* not *quicquid cogitant*. In the first and most important division there has been no change within recorded history, and if esoteric Buddhism were to become the Church of England established by law, and a Great British Republic were to take the place of the monarchy, there would be no change in these. There would probably be none if the whole human race were evicted from this earth and re-established in Mars. In the other class of materials there *is* a change, and the very fact of this change necessitates a certain intermission of dead seasons to let the new form germinate and ripen. There is perhaps no reason why a really great romance should not be written at any time. But it is almost impossible that a continuous supply of great character-novels or novels of manners should be kept up, and no one will deny that the novel of character and manners has been the favourite until quite recently. And so in a manner *consummatum est*. The average man and woman in England of the middle and late nineteenth century, has been drawn and quartered, analysed and "introspected," till there is nothing

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new to be done with him or her either as an *écorché*, or with the skin on, or with clothes on the skin. Merely as a man or woman, he or she can still be dealt with profitably, but then you have a romance and not a novel. Unfortunately, many of our best proved writers continue to write the novel and not the romance, or to treat the romance as if it were the novel. Thus we do not, and for this and the other reasons given and to be given, we cannot, get the best things.][1]

THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

We get indeed many things that are good: good in ways which not so many years ago were unexpected if not undesired. The present year is the twentieth from that in which I first began to review novels, and during the earlier part of the intervening period it was possible, without being unduly given to pessimism, to take a very gloomy view of the future of English fiction, not merely on the considerations just advanced but for other reasons. The novelists of the elder generation were dropping off one by one, and were not in their later years giving anything that could on just critical estimate rank with even their own best work. No actual "youngsters" of decided genius or even very remarkable talent had appeared in the early seventies. Between the old and the new there were practitioners of various, sometimes of great, ability, but hardly any who fulfilled the two conditions of absolutely great literature. The first

[1] Here ends the previously published part of this essay.

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of these is that something—phrase, personality, situation, what not—shall survive the reading of the book, the second that it shall be impossible to read it once only —that it shall of necessity and imperatively take its place on the shelves of that smaller library of predilection which the greater library even of the most limited book-collector contains. One exception there has been indeed to this throughout the whole period, and he to whom I refer remains an exception still. I remember when as a boy I read *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel*, thinking more or less dimly that here was a man from whom at any time an *Esmond* or an *Antiquary*, a *Manon Lescaut* (though I do not think I had read *Manon* then) or a *Trois Mousquetaires* might be expected. Thirty years later I read *One of Our Conquerors* with feelings almost exactly the same. I do not know whether Mr. Meredith will write that book yet—I know no reason why he should not. Defoe was on the eve of sixty when he wrote *Robinson Crusoe*, and Dryden was on the eve of seventy when he wrote the *Fables*.

THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

During the last ten or fifteen years, but especially during the last five or ten, things have been different. There has been a great stir among the dry bones. Some new comers, of power which would have been remarkable at any time, have arisen: not a few oldsters have aroused themselves to take their craft very seriously, and perhaps to magnify their office even a little overmuch:

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journeyings have been made by well-willing neophytes and others to the ends of the earth for models and motives: an immense enthusiasm has been shown for that one representative of the giant race before the flood who has just been referred to. There have been schools, methods, a propaganda, and indeed more than one—

THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

Principle! principle! principle! that's what I hears 'em say,

if the Laureate will pardon me. Our novelists have been, whether by self-examination or by stress of critics, convinced of sin in the matter of not taking enough trouble with the style of their books, with the plot, with the general stage management and stage carpentry. One has said to himself, "Go to, let us treat life with candour"; another, "Shall I live and die in respect of the young person?" a third, "Is there not something to be made of the undogmatically Christian romance?" a fourth, "Let us cease to be insular"; a fifth, "A bas l'incident!" a sixth (this is a rather favourite cry just now), "Let us raise language to a higher power and never say anything simply." Even that other symptom of the uprising of novelists against critics, and their demand that every newspaper shall give at least a column to the sober and serious laudation (for nothing else is to be thought of) of every serious work of fiction that issues from the press, is, though rather a grotesque, a cheering and healthy sign. The novelist, like the actor and

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the poet, is taking his *sacerdoce* sacerdotally, and is indignant at being treated lightly by the profane. This is, I say, a healthy sign: and should be reverently treated by those who have only too much difficulty in taking themselves or anything else with due seriousness. THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

But when we come to look a little narrowly into the results of this activity it may be that they will not strike us as altogether in correspondence. I saw not long ago a half-shamefaced apology for the singular succession of roars which has of late years hailed the advent of divers new novelists and novels. This vociferation, it was urged, was at any rate better than a nasty cold system of ignoring or sneering at the lambs of the flock. I am not quite so sure of that. As a critic I begin to feel myself like Mr. Browning's legate, and am constantly murmuring, "I have known *four*-and-twenty new stars in the firmament of the English novel." This state of things, looked at from a personal point of view, is no doubt pleasant—for the four-and-twentieth, and until the five-and-twentieth appears. But I doubt whether the three-and-twenty like it, and what is of much more importance, I doubt whether it is a good state of things either for the stars or the star-gazers, the latter especially. It must sometimes have seemed to cool-headed onlookers during the last few years that the British public, critics and all, had simply lost all faculty of distinguishing good from bad.

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THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

Among the new reputations of the last decade we all know some cases not merely of undoubted and quite remarkable talent —of talent that must have made its way at any time, though it might have made it more healthily under a less forcing system —but of something that may be called genius by those who are least prodigal of the word. And we all—all of us who are in the least critical—know some cases either of utter worthlessness or of worth so excessively small that one wonders how on earth it has come to be recognised. This can hardly be a healthy state of things—states of "boom" seldom or never are signs of real health in the business in which they from time to time occur. Indeed, if nothing else were considered save the encouragement to over-production, the case would be perilous enough. It is sometimes the fashion to throw Scott in the face of those who demur to it, and who are very often admirers of Scott. But it seems to be forgotten that when Scott began novel-writing seriously he was a man far advanced in life, with an immense accumulated experience of reading, of society, of business, even of the practice of literature in other kinds. This is not usually the case with those new novelists of whom we have recently had about one a year, and of whom we may, it seems, shortly expect one a month. Once more let it be said that some at least of these new novelists would have made their way at any time

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and against any odds. But the others—would not.

However, let us count the positive gains of this recent bustle. These are at least three—variety of method and subject, increased carefulness of treatment, and increased carefulness of style. Perhaps all three are chequered advantages, but they are advantages. Some fifteen years ago the novel, the unconquerable unconventionality of Mr. Meredith once more excepted, had certainly got rather into a rut. The difference between George Eliot and Miss Yonge, between Mr. Trollope and Mr. Black—to take examples as widely different in appearance as possible, but all of the upper class of novelists—might at first seem huge, but when it was subjected to true critical analysis it became very much smaller. Hardly anything—I do not say nothing—was cultivated but the novel as opposed to the romance; and the novel was for the most part further narrowed to ordinary upper middle-class English life. Now we have at least altered all that. The differences may still be a little more apparent than real, but the reality has advanced in proportion far more than the appearance. We have revived the romance, if not on the greatest scale, on a scale which, with almost the solitary exceptions in the first class of *Lorna Doone* and *Westward Ho!* a whole generation had not seen. We have wound ourselves up to something like the pitch of the Romantics of sixty or

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seventy years ago in our demand for local colour, and that not merely external, as theirs too often was, but the local colour which derives from local peculiarities of thought and feeling, of manners and life. We have to a great extent shaken off the "diffusion-of-knowledge" Philistinism and the "sword-and-pen" cant of the middle of the century. If we are not more gay in one sense (for 'tis a generation which jocks wi' extreme deeficulty), we are much more what I believe the very newest school of critics calls *bunt*. In short, we are "boxing it about" merrily, with the old Jacobite confidence that "it will come to our father." Let us hope it will.

THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

At the same time there is no doubt that the English novelist of the present day, incited partly by his study of foreign models and partly by the exhortations of the wicked critics, whose crimes he is never tired of denouncing (especially when, as frequently happens, he is holding the pen of the critic himself), has bestirred himself mightily in the matter of construction. (Something has been said already on this point, and there is no doubt that, from having been the most scholarly of all novelists in the last century, Englishmen had become the most haphazard and lawless in this. We have altered that too to some extent—nay, to a great one. From the teller of short tales who bestirs himself to take away the well-known reproach from England, to the constructor of three-deckers who

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labours to avoid the razeeing of that time-honoured form, by constructing it more conscientiously and scientifically, all our "fictionists" (as, I regret to observe, they allow some of their admirers to call them without instantly taking the offenders' lives) are as busy as bees. And they are as busy once more in the direction of style, where also their predecessors, good easy men, used to be a little, nay, more than a little, remiss. Here Mr. Meredith's epigrams and his quaint remotely worded pictures in phrase are religiously copied as far as the copier can. There the dissection and mounting on microscopic slides of action and thought which have become fashionable in America occupy the reformers. A third set shall be found vying with one another in the endeavour to select and stick together the most gorgeous adjectives, to use words in the most unfamiliar, not to say impossible senses. In short, there is, as Mr. Carlyle observed in one of the best because one of the quietest of his sardonic passages, a cheerful appearance of work going forward. And to do the workers justice, their intention is not, as in that case, destruction at all, but on the contrary construction.

THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

How far has that intention been attained, and what are the drawbacks attending these efforts? This is the less cheerful, but perhaps also the more important, side of the subject. It would be

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uncritical to attack it by asking whether any, and if so what, remarkable books have been produced. Remarkable books may be and are produced at any time when there happen to be remarkable book-producers. The last decade in England has seen at least three, perhaps more, new writers of fiction who would have been remarkable at any time. But the things to put the finger on if possible are not these prize specimens, but the general results of the efforts just described. And perhaps here we shall have occasion to remember once more that exceedingly uncomfortable proverb "Seldom comes a better."

THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

For the advantages above chronicled, with, I trust, impartiality and the absence of prejudice, have brought divers disadvantages in their train. To begin with, there is that extraordinary oppression which weighs upon so many of our novelists in regard to what is called the Young Person. For some time past divers of our most eminent hands have been lifting themselves up against the Young Person, deploring the terrible restraints that she imposes on their growing reputation, occasionally even emancipating themselves from her in a timid British way, and committing excesses in another variety of that shivering consciousness of sin which made Leigh Hunt, when he was a little boy of seven, and had said a naughty word, for a long time afterwards, when anybody took kind notice of him, say to himself, "Ah, they little

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think I'm the boy who said d—n!" Ambition to be the boy who says d—n causes these fiery souls to languish. But why do they not say d—n, and have done with it? The creeping and gingerly approaches to continental licenses of speech and subject which we have seen lately seem to me, I confess, inexpressibly puerile. THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

Nor can I doubt that on the whole the general convention of English novelists during this century has been a sound one. There is, so far as I know, only one instance—Scott's alteration of the plot of *St. Ronan's Well*—where it did distinct, unremedied, irremediable harm. I very much doubt whether *Pendennis* would have been improved by the different cast of one of its episodes which some of my friends desiderate, and I am sure *Vanity Fair* positively gains by the ambiguity in which Becky's technical "guilt" is left. The fact is that the spring of what is very liberally called passion is one which, in appearance facile and powerful, is really a very difficult one to bring into play, and is lamentably monotonous and ineffective when abused, as it is apt to be. For my part, I would excuse either novelist or poet for violating any convention of the kind, but only on the admirable old condition that he comes in with a rope about his neck and is strung up ruthlessly if he fails to produce a masterpiece.

This, however, is of course only part of the great Realist mistake, and that has been spoken of

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already, and elsewhere. The rules as I take it, if rules can be spoken of in such a matter, are two only. The first is, "Disrealise everything, and never forget that whatever art is, it is not nature." The second is the same as that just given, "Try all things if you like: but if you try the exceptional, the abnormal, the unconventional, remember that you try it at your own peril, and that you must either make a great success or an intolerable and inexcusable failure."

THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

So far, however, we are concerned simply with the subject; and as a rule very little depends in any art on the subject. The most that the subject can do is to give the measure of the artist in point of strength. If he is a good artist it does not matter how bad the subject is: if he is a bad artist it does not matter how good the subject is. All really depends on the treatment; and here we get into quite a different region—a region, however, which happens to be that which chiefly invites our attention. The two chief innovations in treatment which have been seen in the period under discussion, and the signs of which are most particularly evident at the present moment, are innovations, the one in handling incident, situation, motive, and so forth, the other in style.

The first may be said to consist in a great extension, as compared with the practice ever since the revival of the novel some eighty years ago, of the representation of the component parts,

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the intermediate processes, of thought and action. This is not in itself new: nothing is. Another form was, or, rather, other forms of this extension were conspicuous in the novel of Richardson in England and Marivaux in France. The last great practitioner of it was Miss Austen, who indeed raised it to something like absolute perfection; but it died with her among ourselves, at the same time, within a few years, as that at which Benjamin Constant in *Adolphe* was producing the last masterpiece of its older manner in France. With us it had no immediate resurrection: it was hardly dead in France before it was revived with a considerable difference by Beyle and Balzac on the other side of the Channel: and this later form, with many alterations and variants, is that which has survived in other countries to this day, is more popular in some of them than ever, and has from their practice been regrafted upon the English novel. The completest exaggerations of it are to be found in America and Russia. Now of this kind of novel (to use the singular for convenience sake) it is sometimes said that "the story is abolished," that "nothing happens," and so forth. This is, of course, not strictly true. A good deal often happens in Russian novels, and I have read American stories of the straitest sect in which incident was not entirely tabooed. But in both the poor creature is taught to know its place.

THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

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THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

The story, even if there is one, is of the last importance: the solemn and painstaking indication, as was said of Marivaux, of "everything you have said, and everything you have thought, and everything you would have liked to think but did not," is of the first. Instead of the presentation of the result you have an endless description of the process; instead of a succinctly presented quotient, an endless array of dividends and divisors. To say that this is never satisfactory would be too much: I know at least one instance, Count Tolstoi's *Ivan Ilyitch*, which may defy criticism. But this very instance shows that the success is a *tour de force*, and it has never, that I know of, been reached in a long story by any one. As a contrast to the average Russian and American novel, take that admirable masterpiece *Pepita Jimenez*. Señor Valera is, I believe, sometimes pointed at for theirs by the ghostly Banquos of the analytic school. O creatures as unfortunate as doleful! It would be impossible to find a more complete or convincing *instantia contradictoria* of their principles. The only weak points in the book are those which draw to their side. Its interest depends on the manners-painting, the characters, and the story, the three things that they never reach, or reach in spite of their tendency to potter and trifle. Fortunately it cannot be said that this particular form has laid much hold on us, but it has laid some, and I

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expect it to lay more. For it is naturally attractive to the half-educated: and half-education is advancing with us by leaps and bounds. THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

It is also to this kind of imperfect culture that the other innovation of treatment, which has been widely described as one of style, appeals. This is more rampant with us, but it has also a more plausible pretext for ramping, for it has excuses of precedent contrast, and excuses of precedent pattern. Scott was notoriously and confessedly a rather careless writer, and the fashion of writing, either in parts separately published or in chapters of magazines, which set in after his death was the very likeliest fashion in the world to encourage careless writing. On the other hand, some of the most popular, and some of the greatest novelists of the second and third quarters of the century—Dickens, George Eliot, Mr. Meredith—wide apart as they were in other ways, agreed in having styles the reverse of careless, styles mannered and mannerised to the very *n*-th. We know from their own descriptions how some much younger writers of fiction have set themselves to acquire manners of their own: we know from their books how they and others have succeeded.

It would be superfluous to repeat here the various remarks bearing on the exact amount and character of that success which will be found in certain earlier essays of this volume. But, as I was writing this paper, a passage remarkably to

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the point came before me in the latest published volume of the *Journal des Goncourt*, the last, as M. Edmond de Goncourt assures us, that we shall have in his lifetime. He was a little annoyed, it seems, at finding that his old friend Flaubert had, in his correspondence with George Sand, spoken disrespectfully of the Goncourtian epithet. "No, my dear Flaubert," retorts M. de Goncourt, "*you* had not the epithets *osées, téméraires et personnelles* which authors who shall be nameless have. You had only *les épithètes, excellemment bonnes, de tout le monde*." Now there is no doubt that "les deux Goncourt," whatever may be thought of the positive value of their work, did anticipate, and have for many years (less excellently, perhaps, since the death of M. Jules, but that is neither here nor there) exhibited the tendencies and preoccupations as to style which have prevailed among the more careful men of letters in all European countries during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Unfortunately, it seems to me that the distinction which M. de Goncourt here puts sharply and well tells in a direction exactly opposite to that in which he intended it to tell. The epithets of genius are exactly the epithets *de tout le monde*, but "good to an excellent degree." These are the epithets of Shakespeare, of Dante, of Homer, of all who have the Shakespearian, the Homeric, the Dantesque qualities. It is the attainment of this "excellent" degree that is the test-rub of genius.

THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

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Whereas the "daring," the "rash," the "personal" epithet, which is the special game and object of talent, and especially of the talent of our day, stands in an entirely different category. When the talent is great the epithet is sometimes very happy, and you give it a hearty hand of approbation, as to the successful trick of a master in conjuring. It is sometimes anything but happy, and if you are well-bred you do not hiss it, but let it pass with as much indulgence as may be, like the *couac* of a generally well-graced singer. In the lower order of attempts, it is at its best a little fatiguing, at its worst utterly unendurable. Never does it excite the immediate assent, the almost silent rapture, the intense unceasing ever-novel admiration which are aroused by the great efforts of genius in making the common as though it were not common, in sublimating the ordinary language terrestrial to the seventh heaven.

THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

Now it stands, I think, to reason that the deliberate seeker after style will too often stray in the direction of the *osé*, the *téméraire*, the *personnel*, not merely in epithets but in other things. Whether it stands to reason or not he certainly does it; and though there may not be many at the moment who perceive his error, the meet consequences of that error never have failed, and are never likely to fail. They are also, as it happens, illustrated unusually well in the history of novels. I have myself gone about for many years—a very

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different and inferior La Fontaine — asking, "Avez vous lu?" *Hysminias and Hysmine*, which the books of reference sometimes call *Ismenias and Ismene.* There must be people who have read it, though I never personally met one. Here, in a very wonderful kind of Greek (it is perfectly useless to attempt to read the book in a translation, for all its charms are necessarily lost), did a certain person of the twelfth century, by genius of anticipation or following of originals mostly lost to us, concentrate in one book Euphuism, Marivauage, æstheticism, divers isms of the present day—which I could only indicate by taking divers respected proper names in vain—even Naturalism in a way, except that the author was a gentleman after his Lower Empire fashion. If the task of reading him is too great—and I must own that his lingo is extraordinary and his matter of a marvellous tediousness—there is Lyly, there is Madeleine de Scudéry, there is Marivaux, there is the Mr. Cumberland whom gods call Sir Fretful, there are the followers of Mrs. Radcliffe, there are many others, great and small, persons of genius, persons of talent, and persons equally destitute of either. They do not always aim specially or principally at style, but they often do so, and they always expend an immense determination, an almost piteous endeavour, on the attempt to do something great by taking thought, by exaggerating popular fashions, by running directly counter

THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

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to them, by being eccentric, by being scrupulously correct, by anything, in short, but waiting for the shepherd's hour and profiting thereby in the best and most straightforward way they can. THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

The point to which we are coming will no doubt have been foreseen for a long time. It is that in this busy, this conscientious, this serious period of novel-writing, our novelists are, as a rule, far too much of Marthas and far too little of Maries. They cumber themselves tremendously about the fashion of serving us, and it seems horribly ungracious to criticise the viands served; yet it may be permissible to suggest that they are in the wrong way. They seem to be beguiled by the dictum—true and important enough in itself—that novel-writing is an art. It is—and a fine art. No doubt also all art has its responsibilities. But the responsibilities of different arts are different, and the methods of discharging them are different too. What makes the art of literature in general the most difficult of all is the fact that nowhere is it more necessary to take pains, and yet that nowhere is mere painstaking not merely so insufficient but so likely to lead the artist wrong. And in this particular division of the literary art there is the still further difficulty that it is easiest, most obvious, and in the special circumstances of recent English literature apparently most praiseworthy, to take pains about those things which are not the root of the matter. In poetry the so-called "formal"

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THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

part is of the essence. A halting verse, a cacophonous rhyme, a lack of musical accompaniment and atmosphere, will render unpoetical the very finest, and in happier circumstances the most really poetical, thoughts. Yet even in poetry attention to these formal matters will but rarely—it will sometimes when it is extraordinary—do of itself. In prose fiction, the nearest to poetry of the kinds of literature when it is at its best, the case is quite different. It is a pity that a novel should not be well written: yet some of the greatest novels of the world are, as no one of the greatest poems of the world is, or could possibly be, written anything but well. It is, at any rate, rather annoying that the plot of a novel should hang loosely together, that the chronology should be obviously impossible, that the author should forget on page 200 what page 100 has told his readers, that there should be little beginning, less middle, and no end. Yet some of the great, some of the greatest novels of the world, are open to objections of this kind. The truth is, that the novel is, while the poem is not, mainly and firstly a criticism of life. Great truths always lurk in great errors, and Naturalism, with its kindred faults, reveals this truth at once. The life may be life as it is, and we have the novel proper—life as we would have it to be, and we have the romance; but one or the other, not photographed, not grovellingly dissected, but rendered in the mediums and by the

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methods proper to art, it must be. All the requirements of the novelist are subsidiary and secondary to this, that he shall in his pages show us the result of the workings of the heart and brain, of the body, soul, and spirit of actual or possible human beings. Poetry is not so limited—novel-writing is. THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

Now the mistake of many of our careful and clever ones at the present day seems to me sometimes that, forgetting this chief and principal thing, they concentrate themselves on the secondary and subsidiary matters; sometimes that, accepting the requirement of rendering life, they prove unequal to it. I have already said that I would not have any subject ruled out as such. Remembering what a certain dramatist did with a certain Bellafront centuries ago, I should not be disposed to refuse permission to a certain novelist to experiment with a certain Tess, though I greatly prefer the straightforwardness of the earlier artist's title. I think that many attempts, and an exactly equal number of failures, have shown the impossibility of making a great historical character of whom much is directly known the central and ostensible hero or heroine of a novel: but if any will try it, he or she may try it at their own peril, and I will applaud if they succeed. I can even conceive (though I have never read one) a novel in which undogmatic Christianity might play a considerable part, and which yet might be readable, and a novel. We

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have not, as it seems to me, a right to complain of any experiments: we have only a right to complain when experiments are made in the teeth of the teaching of experience, and do not succeed. Paradox, crotchet, new moralities, new theories of religion—all may be susceptible of being made into novels that ought to live and will live. It only seems to me that at the present day our clever novelists are a great deal too fond of deliberately selecting the most unsuitable materials and then endeavouring to varnish over the rickety construction with fine writing, with fashionable tricks of expression or treatment, with epithets *osées, téméraires et personnelles*, with doses of popular talk.

THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

One special difficulty which besets the novelist, and of which he not infrequently complains when he aims at excellence, remains to be noticed. He is at the present moment, perhaps, the only artist whose art is liable to be confounded with the simple business of the ordinary tradesman. There is, and has been for at least two generations—perhaps indeed for three or four—a certain steady and increasing demand for "something to read" in the way of fiction. There are no parallels, so far as I know, to his difficulty in this respect. The only persons who stand in the same position are the purveyor of sermons and the purveyor of newspaper articles. But neither of these is expected, and it is entirely at his own risk if either

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undertakes, to present himself as a maker of books, that is to say, as a producer of something which is intended to last. The novel-producer, as distinguished from the novelist, is in really evil case in this matter: and the novelist, as distinguished from the novel-producer, is perhaps in worse. Nobody insists (thank Heaven!) that the usual journalist shall produce all his articles, or the usual preacher all his sermons, for the year in book form:—I can answer for one class that some representatives of it, at any rate, though they may try to do their work as well as possible, would be horrified at the idea. The requirements of the circulating library insist upon the novel-producer doing this very thing: and as we know, the novelist, or he who hopes that he is a novelist, is very angry at the confusion which thus arises from their both addressing the same lady. It is natural, it is inevitable, that the results of this confusion should be almost always bad. When a man, as has just been said, caters for the general in sermon or article or platform speech, it is perfectly understood that he does not, except as a secondary thing and at his own peril and distinct volition, enter for any other stakes or seek to gain the Land of Matters Unforgot. When a man writes verse and publishes it, he does in form enter for the stakes, but the race is not run in public. The minor bard competes, except in the rarest instances, for his own pleasure before an extremely

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select audience composed of a few critics and a number, which it rests with him to limit in one direction and with themselves to limit in another, of holders of presentation copies. For myself I own that I am rather fond of reading minor poetry—much fonder of it than of reading minor novels. But that is a purely personal detail. It is an understood thing that the minor poet is not —I do not say that he does not wish to be—read. He publishes either because he cannot help it or because he likes it. The ambition of the curate, of the leader-writer, of the platform speaker, is sufficed by the day or the day after. But the unhappy novelist is obliged by the state of the demand to divulge himself widely, and put himself on more or less perpetual record. There are those of his kind who are very angry with the managers of literary newspapers for taking account of this fact. They would have literary notice restricted to novels which aim at something higher than the circulating library demand. I have never indeed, being a person with some experience of newspapers, understood quite how their demand is to be complied with. Is the editor to read every novel and decide whether it is novel-journalism or novel-literature? I think this is barely feasible, for even an editor's day has but twenty-four hours, and even an editor's brain requires occasional rest and refreshment. Is he to have a special novel-referee, one, in fact, to

THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

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whom all novels are to be handed over, and according to whose dictum they are to be reviewed or not? The selection of such referees would be difficult, and would, to take an abominably prosaic view, cost the proprietors of newspapers a vast sum of money, for which, except in prayers and curses, they would certainly not receive any appreciable return. Or are the deciding persons to be guided by name, vogue, previous work? In this I am bound again, from no small experience, to express my fear that a great deal of injustice would be done by inclusion in the selected circle, and a little (but the most serious in the long-run) by exclusion from it.

This may seem something of a digression: but it has a real connection with our subject. It is easily conceivable that when journalism and literature are in this way inextricably mixed and blended, almost any means will seem justifiable, nay, praiseworthy, to the aspirant to literature who wishes to declare himself, at once and unmistakably, to be other than those who are content with journalism. And this being so, we can hardly wonder at that strain and stress which I have noticed as marking our present more ambitious novels, without on the whole any corresponding excellence of result. Except at very rare intervals, it is acknowledged that a nation is a lucky nation if it possesses half a dozen persons who really deserve the name of poet: and if the poets in the course of an ordinary

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THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

human life fill half a dozen volumes of the ordinary content of the volume of a circulating library novel, it is acknowledged that they have done very handsomely. We expect to have our novelists by dozens, by scores, by hundreds, and we expect them to produce their volumes, if not by hundreds, yet almost by scores, and certainly by dozens. Is this reasonable? Is this treating the artist as he deserves to be treated?[1] I do not take the other side and say, Is the acceptance of such an expectation and the attempt to fulfil it worthy of the novelist? For then we get into that hopeless and endless question of what Mr. Anthony Trollope used delicately to call "details"—meaning thereby pounds, shillings, and pence—of the arguing of which there is no end, and which, after all, does not concern novel-writing more than any other kind of literature except in one point which is a little important. It *is* much more difficult for the novelist pure and simple to write, as it has been phrased, "articles for money and books for love," than for almost any other variety of man of letters. His novel-journalism without his name would be a drug: and with his name it at once enters into competition with his novel-literature.

[1] Since this was written I have found a counterpart of this argument in M. Ferdinand Brunetière's just published *Essais sur la Littérature Contemporaine*, art. "Critique et Roman," an excellent example of the author's robust polemic, which, however, takes more of a side than I think it necessary to take in a quarrel which would be much better unfought.

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It may seem as if I were shaping a course towards the somewhat paradoxical proposition that it will never be merry with novelists till the public gives over reading novels. And indeed there might be something to be said for this, for as long as the public insists on novels by the hundred and five hundred every year to read, certain things will follow. There will be a vast amount of unworthy stuff produced: there will be now and then for popular (not necessarily or probably for good) novels those huge prizes which entice more and more competitors into the race. There will be more and more the inducement, subtly extending, at once for the tradesman who aspires to be popular and for the artist who aspires to be good, to strive for distinction of whatever kind by illegitimate or scarcely legitimate means—by oddity, by license, by quaintness, by strangeness, by spreading the sail, no matter at what angle, to the *popularis aura*. Demand no doubt creates supply, and supply stimulates demand: but what sort of each does the reflex action produce? I fear that churlish thing, the study of history, would reply, A supply that is by turns cheap and nasty, or distinguished from the cheap and nasty by fantastic preciousness; a demand that is by turns coarse and uncritical or squeamish and morbid.

THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

And all this while there may be some who remember that the novel has never yet shown itself an enduring form in literature; that it rose

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very late, and so may be expected not to die—nothing dies—but to dwindle or change very early; that it has already had an almost unexampled flourishing time in slightly different varieties of one particular form; and that as for many centuries of ascertained progress, or rather continuance, in literature the unchanging human mind was content with brief and occasional indulgences in it, it is by no means impossible that the period of this particular indulgence is drawing to a close. To such reminders I neither assent wholly nor do I wholly rule them out. The printing-press and the common half-educated reader must be taken into consideration. No former age possessed this combination of means to produce supply and circumstances to create demand. The newspaper and the novel, though each has produced in its time literature of the highest value, are both in themselves rather low forms of literature, and it is, I believe, an axiom of physical science, which has given itself to observing such things, that the low form is the most tenacious of life. As long as the Board School lasts, the ordinary manufacture of newspapers and novels must go on—a reflection which may have its consolations to those who are obliged to get their living by working at either mill. But whether either art or craft is likely to develop improvements such as will render it more prolific of real literature, that is one of the too numerous

THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892.

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things which are "obscure to all except to God." The novel has at least produced some of nearly the greatest things in litera- THE ENGLISH NOVEL 1892. ture; this is its great, its exceeding great merit. That it has produced vast volumes of things that to-day are and to-morrow are cast into the oven, is not perhaps, rightly considered, a fact for regret.

And so we end with *Quien sabe?* Enormous fatalism, I take it, impresses itself on careful students of the history of literature—so obstinate is the wind in blowing where it listeth without the slightest reference either to the literary clerk of the weather, or to ingenious and diligent persons who, like our young officers in Burmah, get up on high places and explode large quantities of blasting powder in the hope of coaxing or forcing the wind and the rain with it. All things are possible in a time when a novelist of real talent like M. Zola dismisses Sir Walter Scott as a "boarding-school novelist," and when a critic of real intelligence like my friend Mr. Brander Matthews takes Mr. Howells for an excellent critic. The safer plan is to stand still and see the wondrous works of the Lord. After all, the critic and the prophet are two extremely different persons: and criticism has not been usually most happy when it meddled with prophecy.

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INDEX

ACADEMIES, English and French, 317-320
Addison, 12
Areopagitica, 17
Armstrong, 19
Arnold, Mr. Matthew, 101, 102
Austen, Miss, 397, 410

BANVILLE, Th. de, 220
Baudelaire, Charles, Essay on, 216-252; Baudelaire's position, 216-218; his life and works, 218-222; examples, 223; characteristics, 224-233; sketch of work, 233-246; general remarks, 247-252
Beaconsfield, Lord, 27, 106, Essay viii. *passim*
Béranger, 141
Bertrand, Louis, 244
Bolingbroke, 17
Borel, Petrus, 243
Brazil, Revolutions in, 161 *sqq.*
Browning, Robert, 25
Brunetière, M. Ferdinand, 423 *note*
Bunyan, 14
Burke, 16, 24
Butler, Bishop, 16
Byron, 20

CANDALE, Duke de, 184; portrait of, 199-201
Canning, 24
Carlyle, 23, 25
Cazotte, 51-53
Chamfort and Rivarol, Essay on, 42-80; littérateurs of society, 42-46; editions of Chamfort and Rivarol, 46-48; Chamfort's life, 48-51; the *Prophecy of Cazotte*, 51-53; Rivarol's life, 53-57; their work considered generally, 57-59; characteristics of Chamfort, 59-67; characteristics of Rivarol, 67-74; general remarks on both, 74-80
Champcenetz, 45, 59
Chateaubriand, 61, 146
Chênedollé, 47, 57, 69
Chesterfield, Lord, 43
Clarendon, Lord, 7
Cobbett, 26
Coleridge, 3, 20
Cousin, Victor, 143, 280

DALGETTY, Captain Dugald, 306
Dante, 54
Defoe, 14, 16
De Quincey, 22, 37, 42 *note*, 85-87, 221
Désaugiers, 140, 352-361
Dickens, 26, 392
Diderot, 27, 63, 113, 225, 289

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Disraeli, Mr. *See* Beaconsfield, Lord
Dorat, 344-352
Dowden, Professor, 274
Dryden, 3, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 28

EARLE, Professor, 308
English and French Literature, The Contrasts of, 300-335; contrasts not to be dealt with, 300-308; greater and more continuous length of French, 308-310; order and license in the two languages, 310-320; separate powers of contrast, 320-329; conclusion, 329-335
English Prose Style, Essay on, 1-41; differences of prose and verse style, 1-3; character of modern style, 4, 5; beginning of style proper in English, 5; history of its changes, 5-27; summary thereof, 28, 29; the rhythm of prose and its laws, 30-37; general remarks, 37-41

FIELDING, 15, 16
Florian, 79
Froude, Mr., 103, 104
Fuseli, 44

GAISFORD, Dean, 97
Gautier, L., 180
Gautier, Th., 56, 142, 231
Gibbon, 14-18
Goncourt, M. de, 413
Gray, 16
Green, Mr. J. R., 88 and *note*
Grote, 24, 82

HALIFAX, Lord, 11
Headlong Hall, 4
Heath, Mr. Richard, 274, 275
Hobbes, 9, 201
Houghton, Lord, 261 *note*
Hugo, Victor, 1, 112, 297
Hume, 15, 16, 81
Hysminias and Hysmine, 415

Inheritance, The, 18

JANIN, Jules, 278
Jeffrey, 23
Johnson, 14
Joubert, 75

KINGSLEY, Charles, 36

LA HARPE, 49, 51-53
Lamb, 26
Landor, 23
La Rochefoucauld, 75
Leconte de Lisle, M., 214
Lemaître, M. Jules, 331, 332
Lenclos, Ninon de, 208
Lescure, M. de, 42 *note*
Locke, 13
Lockhart, 23
Lowell, Mr., 30
Lyly, 5
Lyndhurst, Lord, 24

MACAULAY, 23
Maistre, J. de, 299
Mazarin, Hortense Mancini, Duchess de, 185 *sqq.*
Meredith, Mr. George, 25, 400
Mérimée, 114-116, 142
Michelet, Jules, 280, 282, 288, 289
Middleton, Conyers, 17
Mill, J. S., 24, 305
Milton, 3, 7, 9, 17
Miniatures, A Frame of, 336; Parny, 336-344; Dorat, 344-352; Désaugiers, 352-361; Vadé, 361-369; Piron, 369-377; Panard, 377-387
Modern English Prose [1876], Essay on, 81-113; the disuse of style, 81-85; faults of style in 1876, 85-91; influence of journalism, 91-93; of other prevalent modes of writing, 93-98; remarks on some authors, 98-109; general remarks, 109-113

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Montalembert, 291
Moore, 20
Morley, Mr. John, 4
Morris, Mr. Lewis, 219 *note*

NOVEL, The State of the English, 388-426

OZANAM, F., 291

PANARD, 377-387
Paris, Paulin, 281
Parny, 336-344
Pater, Mr., 107-109
Peacock, 27, 267, 314
Peter Wilkins, 15
Piron, 369-377
Pope, 3
Poulet-Malassis, 47

QUANTITY IN ENGLISH, 30-34
Querouaille, Louise de, 213
Quinet, Edgar, A Paradox on, 274-299; Quinet's panegyrists, 274, 275; his life, 276-284; survey of his work, 284-288; secret of Quinet's peculiarities—his democracy, 288-296; a Tory strayed, 296-299

RANCÉ, Abbé de, 193 and *note*
Renan, Ernest, Essay on, 114-160; Mérimée and M. Renan, 114-116; sketch of work to 1880, 116 *sqq.*; M. Renan's method, 120-126; examples of it, 127-133; some characteristics, 133-150; his life, 151-153; later work and summary, 153-160
Rivarol. *See* Chamfort and Rivarol
Rulhière, 68
Ruskin, Mr., 24, 34, 99

SAINT-EVREMOND, Essay on, 180-215; special interest of Saint-Evremond, 180-182; his life, 182-186; editions of him, 187; his subjects, 187-190; the *Conversation du Père Canaye*, 191-197; other examples, 198-207; characteristics, 208-215
Saint-Réal, Abbé de, 206
Scherer, M., 154-156, 217 *note*
Scott, Sir W., 20, 21, 391, 408
Shakespeare, 3
Shelley, 3, 20
Southey, 20
Style, English. *See* Essays i. iii. vii. x. xii.
Swift, 13, 14
Swinburne, Mr., 104-106

TAINE, M., 230
Taylor, Jeremy, 7
Temple, Sir W., 11
Thackeray, 26, 167, 269
Thirlwall, 82
Thoughts on Republics, 161-179
Tillotson, 10

VADÉ, 361-369
Verlaine, M. Paul, 219 *note*
Voltaire, 69, 77

WALPOLE, Horace, 16
Wette, De, 291
Whitman, Walt, 229
Wilson, John, 22, 85
Wordsworth, 20

YOUNG ENGLAND MOVEMENT, The, 253-273

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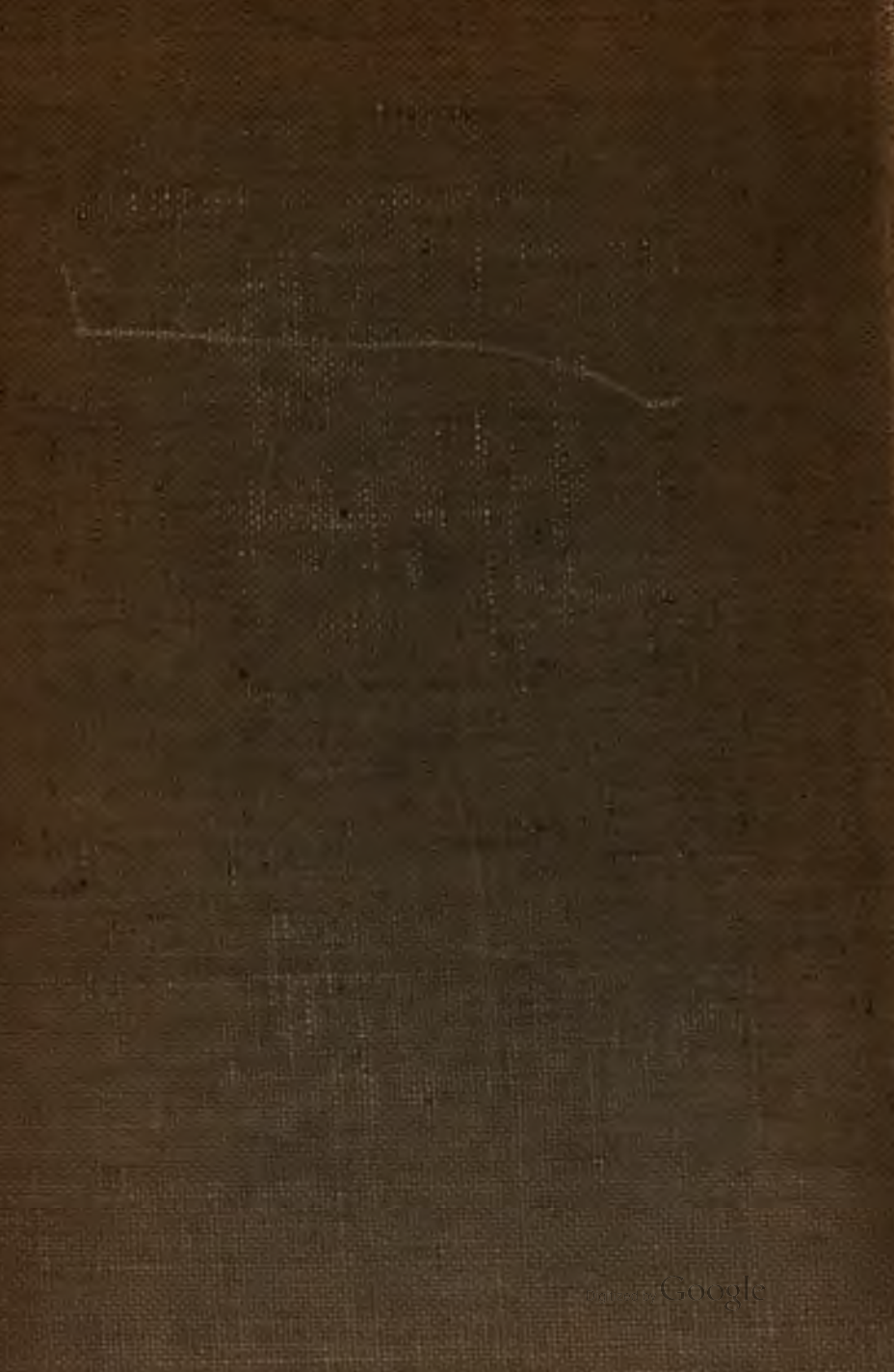
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